




PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS

Volume 2







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T H E S T O R Y O F

PATRIARCHS

A N D

PROPHETS

As Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old

by E. G. WHITE

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The Desire of Ages
The Acts of the Apostles
The Triumph of God's Love*

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The Journey Around Edom

THE encampment of Israel at Kadesh was but a short distance from the borders of Edom, and both Moses and the people greatly desired to follow the route through this country to the Promised Land; accordingly they sent a message, as God had directed them, to the Edomite king—

“Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: and when we cried unto the Lord, He heard our voice, and sent an Angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border. Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king’s highway, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.”

To this courteous request a threatening refusal was returned: “Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.”

Surprised at this repulse, the leaders of Israel sent a second appeal to the king, with the promise, “We will go by the highway: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing anything else, go through on my feet.”

This chapter is based on Numbers 20:14-29; 21:1-9.

THE JOURNEY AROUND EDMOM

"Thou shalt not go through," was the answer. Armed bands of Edomites were already posted at the difficult passes, so that any peaceful advance in that direction was impossible, and the Hebrews were forbidden to resort to force. They must make the long journey around the land of Edom.

Had the people, when brought into trial, trusted in God, the Captain of the Lord's host would have led them through Edom, and the fear of them would have rested upon the inhabitants of the land, so that, instead of manifesting hostility, they would have shown them favor. But the Israelites did not act promptly upon God's word, and while they were complaining and murmuring, the golden opportunity passed. When they were at last ready to present their request to the king, it was refused. Ever since they left Egypt, Satan had been steadily at work to throw hindrances and temptations in their way, that they might not inherit Canaan. And by their own unbelief they had repeatedly opened the door for him to resist the purpose of God.

It is important to believe God's word and act upon it promptly, while His angels are waiting to work for us. Evil angels are ready to contest every step of advance. And when God's providence bids His children go forward, when He is ready to do great things for them, Satan tempts them to displease the Lord by hesitation and delay; he seeks to kindle a spirit of strife or to arouse murmuring or unbelief, and thus deprive them of the blessings that God desired to bestow. God's servants should be minutemen, ever ready to move as fast as His providence opens the way. Any delay on their part gives time for Satan to work to defeat them.

In the directions first given to Moses concerning their passage through Edom, after declaring that the Edomites should be afraid of Israel, the Lord had forbidden His people to make use of this advantage against them. Because the power of God was engaged for Israel, and the fears of the Edomites would make them an easy prey, the Hebrews were not therefore to prey upon them. The command given them was, "Take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a

foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession." Deuteronomy 2:4, 5. The Edomites were descendants of Abraham and Isaac, and for the sake of these His servants, God had shown favor to the children of Esau. He had given them Mount Seir for a possession, and they were not to be disturbed unless by their sins they should place themselves beyond the reach of His mercy. The Hebrews were to dispossess and utterly destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, who had filled up the measure of their iniquity; but the Edomites were still probationers, and as such were to be mercifully dealt with. God delights in mercy, and He manifests His compassion before He inflicts His judgments. He teaches Israel to spare the people of Edom, before requiring them to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan.

The ancestors of Edom and Israel were brothers, and brotherly kindness and courtesy should exist between them. The Israelites were forbidden, either then or at any future time, to revenge the affront given them in the refusal of passage through the land. They must not expect to possess any part of the land of Edom. While the Israelites were the chosen and favored people of God, they must heed the restrictions which He placed upon them. God had promised them a goodly inheritance; but they were not to feel that they alone had any rights in the earth, and seek to crowd out all others. They were directed, in all their intercourse with the Edomites, to beware of doing them injustice. They were to trade with them, buying such supplies as were needed, and promptly paying for all they received. As an encouragement to Israel to trust in God and obey His word they were reminded, "The Lord thy God hath blessed thee; . . . thou hast lacked nothing." Deuteronomy 2:7. They were not dependent upon the Edomites, for they had a God rich in resources. They must not by force or fraud seek to obtain anything pertaining to them; but in all their intercourse they should exemplify the principle of the divine law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Had they in this manner passed through Edom, as God had purposed, the passage would have proved a blessing, not only to themselves, but to the inhabitants of the land; for it would have given them

an opportunity to become acquainted with God's people and His worship and to witness how the God of Jacob prospered those who loved and feared Him. But all this the unbelief of Israel had prevented. God had given the people water in answer to their clamors, but He permitted their unbelief to work out its punishment. Again they must traverse the desert and quench their thirst from the miraculous spring, which, had they but trusted in Him, they would no longer have needed.

Accordingly the hosts of Israel again turned toward the south, and made their way over sterile wastes, that seemed even more dreary after a glimpse of the green spots among the hills and valleys of Edom. From the mountain range overlooking this gloomy desert, rises Mount Hor, whose summit was to be the place of Aaron's death and burial. When the Israelites came to this mountain, the divine command was addressed to Moses—

“Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.”

Together these two aged men and the younger one toiled up the mountain height. The heads of Moses and Aaron were white with the snows of sixscore winters. Their long and eventful lives had been marked with the deepest trials and the greatest honors that had ever fallen to the lot of man. They were men of great natural ability, and all their powers had been developed, exalted, and dignified by communion with the Infinte One. Their life had been spent in unselfish labor for God and their fellow men; their countenances gave evidence of great intellectual power, firmness and nobility of purpose, and strong affections.

Many years Moses and Aaron had stood side by side in their cares and labors. Together they had breasted unnumbered dangers, and had shared together the signal blessing of God; but the time was at hand when they must be separated. They moved on very slowly, for every moment in each other's society was precious. The ascent was steep and toilsome; and as they often paused to rest, they communed together of the past and the future. Before them, as far as the eye could reach, was



spread out the scene of their desert wanderings. In the plain below were encamped the vast hosts of Israel, for whom these chosen men had spent the best portion of their lives; for whose welfare they had felt so deep an interest, and made so great sacrifices. Somewhere beyond the mountains of Edom was the path leading to the Promised Land—that land whose blessings Moses and Aaron were not to enjoy. No rebellious feelings found a place in their hearts, no expression of murmuring escaped their lips; yet a solemn sadness rested upon their countenances as they remembered what had debarred them from the inheritance of their fathers.

Aaron's work for Israel was done. Forty years before, at the age of eighty-three, God had called him to unite with Moses in his great and important mission. He had co-operated with his brother in leading the children of Israel from Egypt. He had held up the great leader's hands when the Hebrew hosts gave battle to Amalek. He had been permitted to ascend Mount Sinai, to approach into the presence of God, and to behold the divine glory. The Lord had conferred upon the family of Aaron the office of the priesthood, and had honored him with the sacred consecration of high priest. He had sustained him in the holy office by the terrible manifestations of divine judgment in the destruction of Korah and his company. It was through Aaron's intercession that the plague was stayed. When his two sons were slain for disregarding God's express command, he did not rebel or even murmur. Yet the record of his noble life had been marred. Aaron committed a grievous sin when he yielded to the clamors of the people and made the golden calf at Sinai; and again, when he united with Miriam in envy and murmuring against Moses. And he, with Moses, offended the Lord at Kadesh by disobeying the command to speak to the rock that it might give forth its water.

God intended that these great leaders of His people should be representatives of Christ. Aaron bore the names of Israel upon his breast. He communicated to the people the will of God. He entered the most holy place on the Day of Atonement, "not without blood," as a mediator for all Israel. He came forth from that work to bless the congregation,

With deep sorrow Moses removed
the holy vestments from Aaron
and placed them upon Eleazar.

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as Christ will come forth to bless His waiting people when His work of atonement in their behalf shall be ended. It was the exalted character of that sacred office as representative of our great High Priest that made Aaron's sin at Kadesh of so great magnitude.

With deep sorrow Moses removed from Aaron the holy vestments, and placed them upon Eleazar, who thus became his successor by divine appointment. For his sin at Kadesh, Aaron was denied the privilege of officiating as God's high priest in Canaan—of offering the first sacrifice in the goodly land, and thus consecrating the inheritance of Israel. Moses was to continue to bear his burden in leading the people to the very borders of Canaan. He was to come within sight of the Promised Land, but was not to enter it. Had these servants of God, when they stood before the rock at Kadesh, borne uncomplainingly the test there brought upon them, how different would have been their future! A wrong act can never be undone. It may be that the work of a lifetime will not recover what has been lost in a single moment of temptation or even thoughtlessness.

The absence from the camp of the two great leaders, and the fact that they had been accompanied by Eleazar, who, it was well known, was to be Aaron's successor in holy office, awakened a feeling of apprehension, and their return was anxiously awaited. As the people looked about them, upon their vast congregation, they saw that nearly all the adults who left Egypt had perished in the wilderness. All felt a foreboding of evil as they remembered the sentence pronounced against Moses and Aaron. Some were aware of the object of that mysterious journey to the summit of Mount Hor, and their solicitude for their leaders was heightened by bitter memories and self-accusings.

The forms of Moses and Eleazar were at last discerned, slowly descending the mountainside, but Aaron was not with them. Upon Eleazar were the sacerdotal garments, showing that he had succeeded his father in the sacred office. As the people with heavy hearts gathered about their leader, Moses told them that Aaron had died in his arms upon Mount Hor, and that they there buried him. The congregation broke forth in mourning and lamentation, for they all loved Aaron,

though they had so often caused him sorrow. "They mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel."

Concerning the burial of Israel's high priest, the Scriptures give only the simple record, "There Aaron died, and there he was buried." Deuteronomy 10:6. In what striking contrast to the customs of the present day was this burial, conducted according to the express command of God. In modern times the funeral services of a man of high position are often made the occasion of ostentatious and extravagant display. When Aaron died, one of the most illustrious men that ever lived, there were only two of his nearest friends to witness his death and to attend his burial, and that lonely grave upon Mount Hor was forever hidden from the sight of Israel. God is not honored in the great display so often made over the dead, and the extravagant expense incurred in returning their bodies to the dust.

The whole congregation sorrowed for Aaron, yet they could not feel the loss so keenly as did Moses. The death of Aaron forcibly reminded Moses that his own end was near; but short as the time of his stay on earth must be, he deeply felt the loss of his constant companion—the one who had shared his joys and sorrows, his hopes and fears, for so many long years. Moses must now continue the work alone; but he knew that God was his friend, and upon Him he leaned more heavily.

Soon after leaving Mount Hor the Israelites suffered defeat in an engagement with Arad, one of the Canaanite kings. But as they earnestly sought help from God, divine aid was granted them, and their enemies were routed. This victory, instead of inspiring gratitude and leading the people to feel their dependence upon God, made them boastful and self-confident. Soon they fell into the old habit of murmuring. They were now dissatisfied because the armies of Israel had not been permitted to advance upon Canaan immediately after their rebellion at the report of the spies nearly forty years before. They pronounced their long sojourn in the wilderness an unnecessary delay, reasoning that they might have conquered their enemies as easily heretofore as now.

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As they continued their journey toward the south, their route lay through a hot, sandy valley, destitute of shade or vegetation. The way seemed long and difficult, and they suffered from weariness and thirst. Again they failed to endure the test of their faith and patience. By continually dwelling on the dark side of their experiences, they separated themselves farther and farther from God. They lost sight of the fact that but for their murmuring when the water ceased at Kadesh, they would have been spared the journey around Edom. God had purposed better things for them. Their hearts should have been filled with gratitude to Him that He had punished their sin so lightly. But instead of this, they flattered themselves that if God and Moses had not interfered, they might now have been in possession of the Promised Land. After bringing trouble upon themselves, making their lot altogether harder than God designed, they charged all their misfortunes upon Him. Thus they cherished bitter thoughts concerning His dealings with them, and finally they became discontented with everything. Egypt looked brighter and more desirable than liberty and the land to which God was leading them.

As the Israelites indulged the spirit of discontent, they were disposed to find fault even with their blessings. "And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread."

Moses faithfully set before the people their great sin. It was God's power alone that had preserved them in "that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." Deuteronomy 8:15. Every day of their travels they had been kept by a miracle of divine mercy. In all the way of God's leading they had found water to refresh the thirsty, bread from heaven to satisfy their hunger, and peace and safety under the shadowy cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Angels had ministered to them as they climbed the rocky heights or threaded the rugged paths of the wilderness. Notwithstanding the hardships they had endured, there was not a feeble one in all their ranks. Their feet had not swol-

len in their long journeys, neither had their clothes grown old. God had subdued before them the fierce beasts of prey and the venomous reptiles of the forest and the desert. If with all these tokens of His love the people still continued to complain, the Lord would withdraw His protection until they should be led to appreciate His merciful care, and return to Him with repentance and humiliation.

Because they had been shielded by divine power they had not realized the countless dangers by which they were continually surrounded. In their ingratitude and unbelief they had anticipated death, and now the Lord permitted death to come upon them. The poisonous serpents that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. As the protecting hand of God was removed from Israel, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures.

Now there was terror and confusion throughout the encampment. In almost every tent were the dying or the dead. None were secure. Often the silence of night was broken by piercing cries that told of fresh victims. All were busy in ministering to the sufferers, or with agonizing care endeavoring to protect those who were not yet stricken. No murmuring now escaped their lips. When compared with the present suffering, their former difficulties and trials seemed unworthy of a thought.

The people now humbled themselves before God. They came to Moses with their confessions and entreaties. "We have sinned," they said, "for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee." Only a little before, they had accused him of being their worst enemy, the cause of all their distress and afflictions. But even when the words were upon their lips, they knew that the charge was false; and as soon as real trouble came they fled to him as the only one who could intercede with God for them. "Pray unto the Lord," was their cry, "that He take away the serpents from us."

Moses was divinely commanded to make a serpent of brass resembling the living ones, and to elevate it among the people. To this, all

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who had been bitten were to look, and they would find relief. He did so, and the joyful news was sounded throughout the encampment that all who had been bitten might look upon the brazen serpent and live. Many had already died, and when Moses raised the serpent upon the pole, some would not believe that merely gazing upon that metallic image would heal them; these perished in their unbelief. Yet there were many who had faith in the provision which God had made. Fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters were anxiously engaged in helping their suffering, dying friends to fix their languid eyes upon the serpent. If these, though faint and dying, could only once look, they were perfectly restored.

The people well knew that there was no power in the serpent of brass to cause such a change in those who looked upon it. The healing virtue was from God alone. In His wisdom He chose this way of displaying His power. By this simple means the people were made to realize that this affliction had been brought upon them by their sins. They were also assured that while obeying God they had no reason to fear, for He would preserve them.

The lifting up of the brazen serpent was to teach Israel an important lesson. They could not save themselves from the fatal effect of the poison in their wounds. God alone was able to heal them. Yet they were required to show their faith in the provision which He had made. They must look in order to live. It was their faith that was acceptable with God, and by looking upon the serpent their faith was shown. They knew that there was no virtue in the serpent itself, but it was a symbol of Christ; and the necessity of faith in His merits was thus presented to their minds. Heretofore many had brought their offerings to God, and had felt that in so doing they made ample atonement for their sins. They did not rely upon the Redeemer to come, of whom these offerings were only a type. The Lord would now teach them that their sacrifices, in themselves, had no more power or virtue than the serpent of brass, but were, like that, to lead their minds to Christ, the great sin offering.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," even so was

the Son of man "lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14, 15. All who have ever lived upon the earth have felt the deadly sting of "that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan." Revelation 12:9. The fatal effects of sin can be removed only by the provision that God has made. The Israelites saved their lives by looking upon the uplifted serpent. That look implied faith. They lived because they believed God's word, and trusted in the means provided for their recovery. So the sinner may look to Christ, and live. He receives pardon through faith in the atoning sacrifice. Unlike the inert and lifeless symbol, Christ has power and virtue in Himself to heal the repenting sinner.

While the sinner cannot save himself, he still has something to do to secure salvation. "Him that cometh to Me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. But we must *come* to Him; and when we repent of our sins, we must believe that He accepts and pardons us. Faith is the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy.

Nothing but the righteousness of Christ can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of grace. There are many who have long desired and tried to obtain these blessings, but have not received them, because they have cherished the idea that they could do something to make themselves worthy of them. They have not looked away from self, believing that Jesus is an all-sufficient Saviour. We must not think that our own merits will save us; Christ is our only hope of salvation. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire. Let none look to self, as though they had power to save themselves. Jesus died for us because we were helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. When we see our sinfulness we should not despond and fear that we have no Saviour, or that He has no thoughts of mercy toward us. At this very time

He is inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved.

Many of the Israelites saw no help in the remedy which Heaven had appointed. The dead and dying were all around them, and they knew that, without divine aid, their own fate was certain; but they continued to lament their wounds, their pains, their sure death, until their strength was gone, and their eyes were glazed, when they might have had instant healing. If we are conscious of our needs, we should not devote all our powers to mourning over them. While we realize our helpless condition without Christ, we are not to yield to discouragement, but rely upon the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Look and live. Jesus has pledged His word; He will save all who come unto Him. Though millions who need to be healed will reject His offered mercy, not one who trusts in His merits will be left to perish.

Many are unwilling to accept of Christ until the whole mystery of the plan of salvation shall be made plain to them. They refuse the look of faith, although they see that thousands have looked, and have felt the efficacy of looking, to the cross of Christ. Many wander in the mazes of philosophy, in search of reasons and evidence which they will never find, while they reject the evidence which God has been pleased to give. They refuse to walk in the light of the Sun of Righteousness, until the reason of its shining shall be explained. All who persist in this course will fail to come to a knowledge of the truth. God will never remove every occasion for doubt. He gives sufficient evidence on which to base faith, and if this is not accepted, the mind is left in darkness. If those who were bitten by the serpents had stopped to doubt and question before they would consent to look, they would have perished. It is our duty, first, to look; and the look of faith will give us life.



The Conquest of Bashan

AFTER passing to the south of Edom, the Israelites turned northward, and again set their faces toward the Promised Land. Their route now lay over a vast, elevated plain, swept by cool, fresh breezes from the hills. It was a welcome change from the parched valley through which they had been traveling, and they pressed forward, buoyant and hopeful. Having crossed the brook Zered, they passed to the east of the land of Moab; for the command had been given, "Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot." And the same direction was repeated concerning the Ammonites, who were also descendants of Lot.

Still pushing northward, the hosts of Israel soon reached the country of the Amorites. This strong and warlike people originally occupied the southern part of the land of Canaan; but, increasing in numbers, they crossed the Jordan, made war upon the Moabites, and gained possession of a portion of their territory. Here they had settled, holding undisputed sway over all the land from the Arnon as far north as the Jabbok. The route to the Jordan which the Israelites desired to pursue lay directly through this territory, and Moses sent a friendly message to Sihon, the Amorite king, at his capital: "Let me pass

This chapter is based on Deuteronomy 2; 3:1-11.

through thy land: I will go along by the highway, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet." The answer was a decided refusal, and all the hosts of the Amorites were summoned to oppose the progress of the invaders. This formidable army struck terror to the Israelites, who were poorly prepared for an encounter with well-armed and well-disciplined forces. So far as skill in warfare was concerned, their enemies had the advantage. To all human appearance, a speedy end would be made of Israel.

But Moses kept his gaze fixed upon the cloudy pillar, and encouraged the people with the thought that the token of God's presence was still with them. At the same time he directed them to do all that human power could do in preparing for war. Their enemies were eager for battle, and confident that they would blot out the unprepared Israelites from the land. But from the Possessor of all lands the mandate had gone forth to the leader of Israel: "Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee."

These nations on the borders of Canaan would have been spared, had they not stood, in defiance of God's word, to oppose the progress of Israel. The Lord had shown Himself to be long-suffering, of great kindness and tender pity, even to these heathen peoples. When Abraham was shown in vision that his seed, the children of Israel, should be strangers in a strange land four hundred years, the Lord gave him the promise, "In the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Genesis 15:16. Although the Amorites were idolaters, whose life was justly forfeited by their great wickedness, God spared them four hundred years to give them unmistakable evidence that He was the only true God, the Maker

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of heaven and earth. All His wonders in bringing Israel from Egypt were known to them. Sufficient evidence was given; they might have known the truth, had they been willing to turn from their idolatry and licentiousness. But they rejected the light and clung to their idols.

When the Lord brought His people a second time to the borders of Canaan, additional evidence of His power was granted to those heathen nations. They saw that God was with Israel in the victory gained over King Arad and the Canaanites, and in the miracle wrought to save those who were perishing from the sting of the serpents. Although the Israelites had been refused a passage through the land of Edom, thus being compelled to take the long and difficult route by the Red Sea, yet in all their journeyings and encampments, past the land of Edom, of Moab and Ammon, they had shown no hostility, and had done no injury to the people or their possessions. On reaching the border of the Amorites, Israel had asked permission only to travel directly through the country, promising to observe the same rules that had governed their intercourse with other nations. When the Amorite king refused this courteous solicitation, and defiantly gathered his hosts for battle, their cup of iniquity was full, and God would now exercise His power for their overthrow.

The Israelites crossed the river Arnon and advanced upon the foe. An engagement took place, in which the armies of Israel were victorious; and, following up the advantage gained, they were soon in possession of the country of the Amorites. It was the Captain of the Lord's host who vanquished the enemies of His people; and He would have done the same thirty-eight years before had Israel trusted in Him.

Filled with hope and courage, the army of Israel eagerly pressed forward, and, still journeying northward, they soon reached a country that might well test their courage and their faith in God. Before them lay the powerful and populous kingdom of Bashan, crowded with great stone cities that to this day excite the wonder of the world—"threescore cities . . . with high walls, gates, and bars; besides un-walled towns a great many." Deuteronomy 3:1-11. The houses were constructed of huge black stones, of such stupendous size as to make

THE CONQUEST OF BASHAN

the buildings absolutely impregnable to any force that in those times could have been brought against them. It was a country filled with wild caverns, lofty precipices, yawning gulfs, and rocky strongholds. The inhabitants of this land, descendants from a giant race, were themselves of marvelous size and strength, and so distinguished for violence and cruelty as to be the terror of all surrounding nations; while Og, the king of the country, was remarkable for size and prowess, even in a nation of giants.

But the cloudy pillar moved forward, and following its guidance the Hebrew hosts advanced to Edrei, where the giant king, with his forces, awaited their approach. Og had skillfully chosen the place of battle. The city of Edrei was situated upon the border of a table-land rising abruptly from the plain, and covered with jagged, volcanic rocks. It could be approached only by narrow pathways, steep and difficult of ascent. In case of defeat, his forces could find refuge in that wilderness of rocks, where it would be impossible for strangers to follow them.

Confident of success, the king came forth with an immense army upon the open plain, while shouts of defiance were heard from the



tableland above, where might be seen the spears of thousands, eager for the fray. When the Hebrews looked upon the lofty form of that giant of giants towering above the soldiers of his army; when they saw the hosts that surrounded him, and beheld the seemingly impregnable fortress, behind which unseen thousands were entrenched, the hearts of many in Israel quaked with fear. But Moses was calm and firm; the Lord had said concerning the king of Bashan, "Fear him not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon."

The calm faith of their leader inspired the people with confidence in God. They trusted all to His omnipotent arm, and He did not fail them. Not mighty giants nor walled cities, armed hosts nor rocky fortresses, could stand before the Captain of the Lord's host. The Lord led the army; the Lord discomfited the enemy; the Lord conquered in behalf of Israel. The giant king and his army were destroyed, and the Israelites soon took possession of the whole country. Thus was blotted from the earth that strange people who had given themselves up to iniquity and abominable idolatry.

In the conquest of Gilead and Bashan there were many who recalled the events which nearly forty years before had, in Kadesh, doomed Israel to the long desert wandering. They saw that the report of the spies concerning the Promised Land was in many respects correct. The cities were walled and very great, and were inhabited by giants, in comparison with whom the Hebrews were mere pygmies. But they could now see that the fatal mistake of their fathers had been in distrusting the power of God. This alone had prevented them from at once entering the goodly land.

When they were at the first preparing to enter Canaan, the undertaking was attended with far less difficulty than now. God had promised His people that if they would obey His voice He would go before them and fight for them; and He would also send hornets to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The fears of the nations had not been generally aroused, and little preparation had been made to oppose

their progress. But when the Lord now bade Israel go forward, they must advance against alert and powerful foes, and must contend with large and well-trained armies that had been preparing to resist their approach.

In their contest with Og and Sihon the people were brought to the same test beneath which their fathers had so signally failed. But the trial was now far more severe than when God had commanded Israel to go forward. The difficulties in their way had greatly increased since they refused to advance when bidden to do so in the name of the Lord. It is thus that God still tests His people. And if they fail to endure the trial, He brings them again to the same point, and the second time the trial will come closer, and be more severe than the preceding. This is continued until they bear the test, or, if they are still rebellious, God withdraws His light from them and leaves them in darkness.

The Hebrews now remembered how once before, when their forces had gone to battle, they had been routed, and thousands slain. But they had then gone in direct opposition to the command of God. They had gone out without Moses, God's appointed leader, without the cloudy pillar, the symbol of the divine presence, and without the ark. But now Moses was with them, strengthening their hearts with words of hope and faith; the Son of God, enshrined in the cloudy pillar, led the way; and the sacred ark accompanied the host. This experience has a lesson for us. The mighty God of Israel is our God. In Him we may trust, and if we obey His requirements He will work for us in as signal a manner as He did for His ancient people. Everyone who seeks to follow the path of duty will at times be assailed by doubt and unbelief. The way will sometimes be so barred by obstacles, apparently insurmountable, as to dishearten those who will yield to discouragement; but God is saying to such, Go forward. Do your duty at any cost. The difficulties that seem so formidable, that fill your soul with dread, will vanish as you move forward in the path of obedience, humbly trusting in God.



chapter 40

Balaam

RETURNING to the Jordan from the conquest of Bashan, the Israelites, in preparation for the immediate invasion of Canaan, encamped beside the river, above its entrance into the Dead Sea, and just opposite the plain of Jericho. They were upon the very borders of Moab, and the Moabites were filled with terror at the close proximity of the invaders.

The people of Moab had not been molested by Israel, yet they had watched with troubled forebodings all that had taken place in the surrounding countries. The Amorites, before whom they had been forced to retreat, had been conquered by the Hebrews, and the territory which the Amorites had wrested from Moab was now in the possession of Israel. The hosts of Bashan had yielded before the mysterious power enshrouded in the cloudy pillar, and the giant strongholds were occupied by the Hebrews. The Moabites dared not risk an attack upon them; an appeal to arms was hopeless in face of the supernatural agencies that wrought in their behalf. But they determined, as Pharaoh had done, to enlist the power of sorcery to counteract the work of God. They would bring a curse upon Israel.

The people of Moab were closely connected with the Midianites, both by the ties of nationality and religion. And Balak, the king of

This chapter is based on Numbers 22 to 24.

Balaam looked from the heights at the camp of Israel, and with inspired words he blessed God's chosen ones.

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Moab, aroused the fears of the kindred people, and secured their co-operation in his designs against Israel by the message, "Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." Balaam, an inhabitant of Mesopotamia, was reported to possess supernatural powers, and his fame had reached to the land of Moab. It was determined to call him to their aid. Accordingly, messengers of "the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian," were sent to secure his divinations and enchantments against Israel.

The ambassadors at once set out on their long journey over the mountains and across the deserts to Mesopotamia; and upon finding Balaam, they delivered to him the message of their king: "Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."

Balaam was once a good man and a prophet of God; but he had apostatized, and had given himself up to covetousness; yet he still professed to be a servant of the Most High. He was not ignorant of God's work in behalf of Israel; and when the messengers announced their errand, he well knew that it was his duty to refuse the rewards of Balak and to dismiss the ambassadors. But he ventured to dally with temptation, and urged the messengers to tarry with him that night, declaring that he could give no decided answer till he had asked counsel of the Lord. Balaam knew that his curse could not harm Israel. God was on their side, and so long as they were true to Him no adverse power of earth or hell could prevail against them. But his pride was flattered by the words of the ambassadors, "He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." The bribe of costly gifts and prospective exaltation excited his covetousness. He greedily accepted the offered treasures, and then, while professing strict obedience to the will of God, he tried to comply with the desires of Balak.

In the night season the angel of God came to Balaam with the

message, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

In the morning Balaam reluctantly dismissed the messengers, but he did not tell them what the Lord had said. Angry that his visions of gain and honor had been suddenly dispelled, he petulantly exclaimed, "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you."

Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness." 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their overconscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous. They will do and dare most terrible things when once they have given themselves to the control of avarice and a desire for power. Many flatter themselves that they can depart from strict integrity for a time, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and that having gained their object, they can change their course when they please. Such are entangling themselves in the snare of Satan, and it is seldom that they escape.

When the messengers reported to Balak the prophet's refusal to accompany them, they did not intimate that God had forbidden him. Supposing that Balaam's delay was merely to secure a richer reward, the king sent princes more in number and more honorable than the first, with promises of higher honors, and with authority to concede to any terms that Balaam might demand. Balak's urgent message to the prophet was, "Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: for I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."

A second time Balaam was tested. In response to the solicitations of the ambassadors he professed great conscientiousness and integrity,

assuring them that no amount of gold and silver could induce him to go contrary to the will of God. But he longed to comply with the king's request; and although the will of God had already been definitely made known to him, he urged the messengers to tarry, that he might further inquire of God; as though the Infinite One were a man, to be persuaded.

In the night season the Lord appeared to Balaam and said, "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." Thus far the Lord would permit Balaam to follow his own will, because he was determined upon it. He did not seek to do the will of God, but chose his own course, and then endeavored to secure the sanction of the Lord.

There are thousands at the present day who are pursuing a similar course. They would have no difficulty in understanding their duty if it were in harmony with their inclinations. It is plainly set before them in the Bible or is clearly indicated by circumstances and reason. But because these evidences are contrary to their desires and inclinations they frequently set them aside and presume to go to God to learn their duty. With great apparent conscientiousness they pray long and earnestly for light. But God will not be trifled with. He often permits such persons to follow their own desires and to suffer the result. "My people would not hearken to My voice. . . . So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels." Psalm 81: 11, 12. When one clearly sees a duty, let him not presume to go to God with the prayer that he may be excused from performing it. He should rather, with a humble, submissive spirit, ask for divine strength and wisdom to meet its claims.

The Moabites were a degraded, idolatrous people; yet according to the light which they had received their guilt was not so great in the sight of Heaven as was that of Balaam. As he professed to be God's prophet, however, all he should say would be supposed to be uttered by divine authority. Hence he was not to be permitted to speak as he chose, but must deliver the message which God should give him. "The

word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do," was the divine command.

Balaam had received permission to go with the messengers from Moab if they came in the morning to call him. But, annoyed at his delay, and expecting another refusal, they set out on their homeward journey without further consultation with him. Every excuse for complying with the request of Balak had now been removed. But Balaam was determined to secure the reward; and, taking the beast upon which he was accustomed to ride, he set out on the journey. He feared that even now the divine permission might be withdrawn, and he pressed eagerly forward, impatient lest he should by some means fail to gain the coveted reward.

But "the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him." The animal saw the divine messenger, who was unperceived by the man, and turned aside from the highway into a field. With cruel blows Balaam brought the beast back into the path; but again, in a narrow place shut in by walls, the angel appeared, and the animal, trying to avoid the menacing figure, crushed her master's foot against the wall. Balaam was blinded to the heavenly interposition, and knew not that God was obstructing his path. The man became exasperated, and beating the ass unmercifully, forced it to proceed.

Again, "in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left," the angel appeared, as before, in a threatening attitude; and the poor beast, trembling with terror, made a full stop, and fell to the earth under its rider. Balaam's rage was unbounded, and with his staff he smote the animal more cruelly than before. God now opened its mouth, and by "the dumb ass speaking with man's voice," he "forbade the madness of the prophet." 2 Peter 2:16. "What have I done unto thee," it said, "that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

Furious at being thus hindered in his journey, Balaam answered the beast as he would have addressed an intelligent being—"Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee." Here was a professed magician, on his way



to pronounce a curse upon a whole people with the intent to paralyze their strength, while he had not power even to slay the animal upon which he rode!

The eyes of Balaam were now opened, and he beheld the angel of God standing with drawn sword ready to slay him. In terror "he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face." The angel said to him, "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: and the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive."

Balaam owed the preservation of his life to the poor animal that he had treated so cruelly. The man who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord, who declared that his eyes were open, and he saw the "vision of the Almighty," was so blinded by covetousness and ambition that he could not discern the angel of God visible to his beast. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." 2 Corinthians 4:4. How many are thus blinded! They rush on in forbidden paths, transgressing the divine law, and cannot discern that God and His angels are against them. Like Balaam they are angry at those who would prevent their ruin.

Balaam had given evidence of the spirit that controlled him, by his treatment of his beast. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Proverbs 12:10. Few realize as they should the sinfulness of abusing animals or leaving them to suffer from neglect. He who created man made the lower animals also, and "His tender mercies are over all His works." Psalm 145:9. The animals were created to serve man, but he has no right to cause them pain by harsh treatment or cruel exaction.

It is because of man's sin that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." Romans 8:22. Suffering and death were thus entailed, not only upon the human race, but upon the animals. Surely, then, it becomes man to seek to lighten, instead of increasing, the weight of suffering which his transgression has brought upon God's

Three times the angel obstructed
the way, and three times Balaam
beat his poor beast unmercifully.

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creatures. He who will abuse animals because he has them in his power is both a coward and a tyrant. A disposition to cause pain, whether to our fellow men or to the brute creation, is satanic. Many do not realize that their cruelty will ever be known, because the poor dumb animals cannot reveal it. But could the eyes of these men be opened, as were those of Balaam, they would see an angel of God standing as a witness, to testify against them in the courts above. A record goes up to heaven, and a day is coming when judgment will be pronounced against those who abuse God's creatures.

When he beheld the messenger of God, Balaam exclaimed in terror, "I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." The Lord suffered him to proceed on his journey, but gave him to understand that his words should be controlled by divine power. God would give evidence to Moab that the Hebrews were under the guardianship of Heaven, and this He did effectually when He showed them how powerless Balaam was even to utter a curse against them without divine permission.

The king of Moab, being informed of the approach of Balaam, went out with a large retinue to the borders of his kingdom, to receive him. When he expressed his astonishment at Balaam's delay, in view of the rich rewards awaiting him, the prophet's answer was, "Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." Balaam greatly regretted this restriction; he feared that his purpose could not be carried out, because the Lord's controlling power was upon him.

With great pomp the king, with the chief dignitaries of his kingdom, escorted Balaam to "the high places of Baal," from which he could survey the Hebrew host. Behold the prophet as he stands upon the lofty height, looking down over the encampment of God's chosen people. How little do the Israelites know of what is taking place so near them! How little do they know of the care of God, extended over them by day and by night! How dull are the perceptions of God's people!

How slow are they, in every age, to comprehend His great love and mercy! If they could discern the wonderful power of God constantly exerted in their behalf, would not their hearts be filled with gratitude for His love, and with awe at the thought of His majesty and power?

Balaam had some knowledge of the sacrificial offerings of the Hebrews, and he hoped that by surpassing them in costly gifts he might secure the blessing of God and ensure the accomplishment of his sinful projects. Thus the sentiments of the idolatrous Moabites were gaining control of his mind. His wisdom had become foolishness; his spiritual vision was beclouded; he had brought blindness upon himself by yielding to the power of Satan.

By Balaam's direction seven altars were erected, and he offered a sacrifice upon each. He then withdrew to a "high place," to meet with God, promising to make known to Balak whatever the Lord should reveal.

With the nobles and princes of Moab the king stood beside the sacrifice, while around them gathered the eager multitude, watching for the return of the prophet. He came at last, and the people waited for the words that should paralyze forever that strange power exerted in behalf of the hated Israelites. Balaam said:

"The king of Moab hath brought me from Aram,
 Out of the mountains of the east,
 Saying, Come, curse me Jacob,
 And come, defy Israel.
 How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?
 Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?
 For from the top of the rocks I see him,
 And from the hills I behold him:
 Lo, the people shall dwell alone,
 And shall not be reckoned among the nations.
 Who can count the dust of Jacob,
 And the number of the fourth part of Israel?
 Let me die the death of the righteous,
 And let my last end be like his!"

Balaam confessed that he came with the purpose of cursing Israel,

but the words he uttered were directly contrary to the sentiments of his heart. He was constrained to pronounce blessings, while his soul was filled with curses.

As Balaam looked upon the encampment of Israel he beheld with astonishment the evidence of their prosperity. They had been represented to him as a rude, disorganized multitude, infesting the country in roving bands that were a pest and terror to the surrounding nations; but their appearance was the reverse of all this. He saw the vast extent and perfect arrangement of their camp, everything bearing the marks of thorough discipline and order. He was shown the favor with which God regarded Israel, and their distinctive character as His chosen people. They were not to stand upon a level with other nations, but to be exalted above them all. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." At the time when these words were spoken the Israelites had no permanent settlement, and their peculiar character, their manners and customs, were not familiar to Balaam. But how strikingly was this prophecy fulfilled in the after-history of Israel! Through all the years of their captivity, through all the ages since they were dispersed among the nations, they have remained a distinct people. So the people of God—the true Israel—though scattered throughout all nations, are on earth but sojourners, whose citizenship is in heaven.

Not only was Balaam shown the history of the Hebrew people as a nation, but he beheld the increase and prosperity of the true Israel of God to the close of time. He saw the special favor of the Most High attending those who love and fear Him. He saw them supported by His arm as they enter the dark valley of the shadow of death. And he beheld them coming forth from their graves, crowned with glory, honor, and immortality. He saw the redeemed rejoicing in the unfading glories of the earth made new. Gazing upon the scene, he exclaimed, "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" And as he saw the crown of glory on every brow, the joy beaming from every countenance, and looked forward to that endless life of unalloyed happiness, he uttered the solemn

prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

If Balaam had had a disposition to accept the light that God had given, he would now have made true his words; he would at once have severed all connection with Moab. He would no longer have presumed upon the mercy of God, but would have returned to Him with deep repentance. But Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, and these he was determined to secure.

Balak had confidently expected a curse that would fall like a withering blight upon Israel; and at the words of the prophet he passionately exclaimed, "What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou has blessed them altogether." Balaam, seeking to make a virtue of necessity, professed to have spoken from a conscientious regard for the will of God the words that had been forced from his lips by divine power. His answer was, "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?"

Balak could not even now relinquish his purpose. He decided that the imposing spectacle presented by the vast encampment of the Hebrews had so intimidated Balaam that he dared not practice his divinations against them. The king determined to take the prophet to some point where only a small part of the host might be seen. If Balaam could be induced to curse them in detached parties, the whole camp would soon be devoted to destruction. On the top of an elevation called Pisgah another trial was made. Again seven altars were erected, whereon were placed the same offerings as at the first. The king and his princes remained by the sacrifices, while Balaam retired to meet with God. Again the prophet was entrusted with a divine message, which he was powerless to alter or withhold.

When he appeared to the anxious, expectant company the question was put to him, "What hath the Lord spoken?" The answer, as before, struck terror to the heart of king and princes:

"God is not a man, that He should lie;
Neither the son of man, that He should repent:
Hath He said, and shall He not do it?

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Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?
Behold, I have received commandment to bless:
And He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.
He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob,
Neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel:
The Lord his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them."

Awed by these revelations, Balaam exclaimed, "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." The great magician had tried his power of enchantment, in accordance with the desire of the Moabites; but concerning this very occasion it should be said of Israel, "What hath God wrought!" While they were under the divine protection, no people or nation, though aided by all the power of Satan, should be able to prevail against them. All the world should wonder at the marvelous work of God in behalf of His people—that a man determined to pursue a sinful course should be so controlled by divine power as to utter, instead of imprecations, the richest and most precious promises, in the language of sublime and impassioned poetry. And the favor of God at this time manifested toward Israel was to be an assurance of His protecting care for His obedient, faithful children in all ages. When Satan should inspire evil men to misrepresent, harass, and destroy God's people, this very occurrence would be brought to their remembrance, and would strengthen their courage and their faith in God.

The king of Moab, disheartened and distressed, exclaimed, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all." Yet a faint hope still lingered in his heart, and he determined to make another trial. He now conducted Balaam to Mount Peor, where was a temple devoted to the licentious worship of Baal, their god. Here the same number of altars were erected as before, and the same number of sacrifices were offered; but Balaam went not alone, as at other times, to learn God's will. He made no pretense of sorcery, but standing beside the altars, he looked abroad upon the tents of Israel. Again the Spirit of God rested upon him, and the divine message came from his lips:

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob,
And thy tabernacles, O Israel!

As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side,
As the trees of lignaloës which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters,
And his King shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. . . .
He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up?
Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

The prosperity of God's people is here represented by some of the most beautiful figures to be found in nature. The prophet likens Israel to fertile valleys covered with abundant harvests; to flourishing gardens watered by never-failing springs; to the fragrant sandal tree and the stately cedar. The figure last mentioned is one of the most strikingly beautiful and appropriate to be found in the Inspired Word. The cedar of Lebanon was honored by all the people of the East. The class of trees to which it belongs is found wherever man has gone throughout the earth. From the arctic regions to the tropic zone they flourish, rejoicing in the heat, yet braving the cold; springing in rich luxuriance by the riverside, yet towering aloft upon the parched and thirsty waste. They plant their roots deep among the rocks of the mountains and boldly stand in defiance of the tempest. Their leaves are fresh and green when all else has perished at the breath of winter. Above all other trees the cedar of Lebanon is distinguished for its strength, its firmness, its undecaying vigor; and this is used as a symbol of those whose life is "hid with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3. Says the Scripture, "The righteous . . . shall grow like a cedar." Psalm 92:12. The divine hand has exalted the cedar as king over the forest. "The fir trees were not like his boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like his branches" (Ezekiel 31:8); nor any tree in the garden of God. The cedar is repeatedly employed as an emblem of royalty, and its use in Scripture to represent the righteous shows how Heaven regards those who do the will of God.

Balaam prophesied that Israel's King would be greater and more powerful than Agag. This was the name given to the kings of the

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Amalekites, who were at this time a very powerful nation; but Israel, if true to God, would subdue all her enemies. The King of Israel was the Son of God; and His throne was one day to be established in the earth, and His power to be exalted above all earthly kingdoms.

As he listened to the prophet's words Balak was overwhelmed with disappointed hope, with fear and rage. He was indignant that Balaam could have given him the least encouragement of a favorable response, when everything was determined against him. He regarded with scorn the prophet's compromising, deceptive course. The king exclaimed fiercely, "Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honor; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor." The answer was that the king had been forewarned that Balaam could speak only the message given him from God.

Before returning to his people, Balaam uttered a most beautiful and sublime prophecy of the world's Redeemer and the final destruction of the enemies of God:

"I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh:

There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel,

And shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

And he closed by predicting the complete destruction of Moab and Edom, of Amalek and the Kenites, thus leaving to the Moabitish king no ray of hope.

Disappointed in his hopes of wealth and promotion, in disfavor with the king, and conscious that he had incurred the displeasure of God, Balaam returned from his self-chosen mission. After he had reached his home the controlling power of the Spirit of God left him, and his covetousness, which had been merely held in check, prevailed. He was ready to resort to any means to gain the reward promised by Balak. Balaam knew that the prosperity of Israel depended upon their obedience to God, and that there was no way to cause their overthrow but by seducing them into sin. He now decided to secure Balak's favor by advising the Moabites of the course to be pursued to bring a curse upon Israel.

He immediately returned to the land of Moab and laid his plans before the king. The Moabites themselves were convinced that so long as Israel remained true to God, He would be their shield. The plan proposed by Balaam was to separate them from God by enticing them into idolatry. If they could be led to engage in the licentious worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, their omnipotent Protector would become their enemy, and they would soon fall a prey to the fierce, warlike nations around them. This plan was readily accepted by the king, and Balaam himself remained to assist in carrying it into effect.

Balaam witnessed the success of his diabolical scheme. He saw the curse of God visited upon His people, and thousands falling under His judgments; but the divine justice that punished sin in Israel did not permit the tempters to escape. In the war of Israel against the Midianites, Balaam was slain. He had felt a presentiment that his own end was near when he exclaimed, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" But he had not chosen to live the life of the righteous, and his destiny was fixed with the enemies of God.

The fate of Balaam was similar to that of Judas, and their characters bear a marked resemblance to each other. Both these men tried to unite the service of God and mammon, and met with signal failure. Balaam acknowledged the true God, and professed to serve Him; Judas believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and united with His followers. But Balaam hoped to make the service of Jehovah the steppingstone to the acquirement of riches and worldly honor; and failing in this he stumbled and fell and was broken. Judas expected by his connection with Christ to secure wealth and promotion in that worldly kingdom which, as he believed, the Messiah was about to set up. The failure of his hopes drove him to apostasy and ruin. Both Balaam and Judas had received great light and enjoyed special privileges, but a single cherished sin poisoned the entire character and caused their destruction.

It is a perilous thing to allow an unchristian trait to live in the heart. One cherished sin will, little by little, debase the character, bringing all its nobler powers into subjection to the evil desire. The

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removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the indulgence of one evil habit, one neglect of the high claims of duty, breaks down the defenses of the soul and opens the way for Satan to come in and lead us astray. The only safe course is to let our prayers go forth daily from a sincere heart, as did David, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." Psalm 17:5.

Apostasy at the Jordan

WITH joyful hearts and renewed faith in God, the victorious armies of Israel had returned from Bashan. They had already gained possession of a valuable territory, and they were confident of the immediate conquest of Canaan. Only the river Jordan lay between them and the Promised Land. Just across the river was a rich plain, covered with verdure, watered with streams from copious fountains, and shaded by luxuriant palm trees. On the western border of the plain rose the towers and palaces of Jericho, so embosomed in its palm-tree groves that it was called "the city of palm trees."

On the eastern side of Jordan, between the river and the high table-land which they had been traversing, was also a plain, several miles in width and extending some distance along the river. This sheltered valley had the climate of the tropics; here flourished the shittim, or acacia, tree, giving to the plain the name, "Vale of Shittim." It was here that the Israelites encamped, and in the acacia groves by the riverside they found an agreeable retreat.

But amid these attractive surroundings they were to encounter an evil more deadly than mighty hosts of armed men or the wild beasts of the wilderness. That country, so rich in natural advantages, had

This chapter is based on Numbers 25.

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been defiled by the inhabitants. In the public worship of Baal, the leading deity, the most degrading and iniquitous scenes were constantly enacted. On every side were places noted for idolatry and licentiousness, the very names being suggestive of the vileness and corruption of the people.

These surroundings exerted a polluting influence upon the Israelites. Their minds became familiar with the vile thoughts constantly suggested; their life of ease and inaction produced its demoralizing effect; and almost unconsciously to themselves they were departing from God and coming into a condition where they would fall an easy prey to temptation.

During the time of their encampment beside Jordan, Moses was preparing for the occupation of Canaan. In this work the great leader was fully employed; but to the people this time of suspense and expectation was most trying, and before many weeks had elapsed their history was marred by the most frightful departures from virtue and integrity.

At first there was little intercourse between the Israelites and their heathen neighbors, but after a time Midianitish women began to steal into the camp. Their appearance excited no alarm, and so quietly were their plans conducted that the attention of Moses was not called to the matter. It was the object of these women, in their association with the Hebrews, to seduce them into transgression of the law of God, to draw their attention to heathen rites and customs, and lead them into idolatry. These motives were studiously concealed under the garb of friendship, so that they were not suspected, even by the guardians of the people.

At Balaam's suggestion, a grand festival in honor of their gods was appointed by the king of Moab, and it was secretly arranged that Balaam should induce the Israelites to attend. He was regarded by them as a prophet of God, and hence had little difficulty in accomplishing his purpose. Great numbers of the people joined him in witnessing the festivities. They ventured upon the forbidden ground, and were entangled in the snare of Satan. Beguiled with music and dancing, and

allured by the beauty of heathen vestals, they cast off their fealty to Jehovah. As they united in mirth and feasting, indulgence in wine beclouded their senses and broke down the barriers of self-control. Passion had full sway; and having defiled their consciences by lewdness, they were persuaded to bow down to idols. They offered sacrifice upon heathen altars and participated in the most degrading rites.

It was not long before the poison had spread, like a deadly infection, through the camp of Israel. Those who would have conquered their enemies in battle were overcome by the wiles of heathen women. The people seemed to be infatuated. The rulers and the leading men were among the first to transgress, and so many of the people were guilty that the apostasy became national. "Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor." When Moses was aroused to perceive the evil, the plots of their enemies had been so successful that not only were the Israelites participating in the licentious worship at Mount Peor, but the heathen rites were coming to be observed in the camp of Israel. The aged leader was filled with indignation, and the wrath of God was kindled.

Their iniquitous practices did that for Israel which all the enchantments of Balaam could not do—they separated them from God. By swift-coming judgments the people were awakened to the enormity of their sin. A terrible pestilence broke out in the camp, to which tens of thousands speedily fell a prey. God commanded that the leaders in this apostasy be put to death by the magistrates. This order was promptly obeyed. The offenders were slain, then their bodies were hung up in sight of all Israel that the congregation, seeing the leaders so severely dealt with, might have a deep sense of God's abhorrence of their sin and the terror of His wrath against them.

All felt that the punishment was just, and the people hastened to the tabernacle, and with tears and deep humiliation confessed their sin. While they were thus weeping before God, at the door of the tabernacle, while the plague was still doing its work of death, and the magistrates were executing their terrible commission, Zimri, one of the nobles of Israel, came boldly into the camp, accompanied by a Midianitish harlot, a princess "of a chief house in Midian," whom he

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escorted to his tent. Never was vice bolder or more stubborn. Inflamed with wine, Zimri declared his "sin as Sodom," and gloried in his shame. The priests and leaders had prostrated themselves in grief and humiliation, weeping "between the porch and the altar," and entreating the Lord to spare His people, and give not His heritage to reproach, when this prince in Israel flaunted his sin in the sight of the congregation, as if to defy the vengeance of God and mock the judges of the nation. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, rose up from among the congregation, and seizing a javelin, "he went after the man of Israel into the tent," and slew them both. Thus the plague was stayed, while the priest who had executed the divine judgment was honored before all Israel, and the priesthood was confirmed to him and to his house forever.

Phinehas "hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel," was the divine message; "wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for His God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel."

The judgments visited upon Israel for their sin at Shittim, destroyed the survivors of that vast company, who, nearly forty years before, had incurred the sentence, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." The numbering of the people by divine direction, during their encampment on the plains of Jordan, showed that "of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, . . . there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun." Numbers 26:64, 65.

God had sent judgments upon Israel for yielding to the enticements of the Midianites; but the tempters were not to escape the wrath of divine justice. The Amalekites, who had attacked Israel at Rephidim, falling upon those who were faint and weary behind the host, were not punished till long after; but the Midianites who seduced them into sin were speedily made to feel God's judgments, as being the more dangerous enemies. "Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites"

APOSTASY AT THE JORDAN

(Numbers 31:2), was the command of God to Moses; "afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people." This mandate was immediately obeyed. One thousand men were chosen from each of the tribes and sent out under the leadership of Phinehas. "And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses. . . . And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; . . . five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword." Verses 7, 8. The women also, who had been made captives by the attacking army, were put to death at the command of Moses, as the most guilty and most dangerous of the foes of Israel.

Such was the end of them that devised mischief against God's people. Says the psalmist: "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken." Psalm 9:15. "For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness." When men "gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous," the Lord "shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall



cut them off in their own wickedness." Psalm 94:14, 15, 21, 23.

When Balaam was called to curse the Hebrews he could not, by all his enchantments, bring evil upon them; for the Lord had not "beheld iniquity in Jacob," neither had He "seen perverseness in Israel." Numbers 23:21, 23. But when through yielding to temptation they transgressed God's law, their defense departed from them. When the people of God are faithful to His commandments, "there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." Hence all the power and wily arts of Satan are exerted to seduce them into sin. If those who profess to be the depositaries of God's law become transgressors of its precepts, they separate themselves from God, and they will be unable to stand before their enemies.

The Israelites, who could not be overcome by the arms or by the enchantments of Midian, fell a prey to her harlots. Such is the power that woman, enlisted in the service of Satan, has exerted to entrap and destroy souls. "She hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her." Proverbs 7:26. It was thus that the children of Seth were seduced from their integrity, and the holy seed became corrupt. It was thus that Joseph was tempted. Thus Samson betrayed his strength, the defense of Israel, into the hands of the Philistines. Here David stumbled. And Solomon, the wisest of kings, who had thrice been called the beloved of his God, became a slave of passion, and sacrificed his integrity to the same bewitching power.

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Corinthians 10:11, 12. Satan well knows the material with which he has to deal in the human heart. He knows—for he has studied with fiendish intensity for thousands of years—the points most easily assailed in every character; and through successive generations he has wrought to overthrow the strongest men, princes in Israel, by the same temptations that were so successful at Baalpeor. All along through the ages there are strewn wrecks of character that

have been stranded upon the rocks of sensual indulgence. As we approach the close of time, as the people of God stand upon the borders of the heavenly Canaan, Satan will, as of old, redouble his efforts to prevent them from entering the goodly land. He lays his snares for every soul. It is not the ignorant and uncultured merely that need to be guarded; he will prepare his temptations for those in the highest positions, in the most holy office; if he can lead them to pollute their souls, he can through them destroy many. And he employs the same agents now as he employed three thousand years ago. By worldly friendships, by the charms of beauty, by pleasure seeking, mirth, feasting, or the wine cup, he tempts to the violation of the seventh commandment.

Satan seduced Israel into licentiousness before leading them to idolatry. Those who will dishonor God's image and defile His temple in their own persons will not scruple at any dishonor to God that will gratify the desire of their depraved hearts. Sensual indulgence weakens the mind and debases the soul. The moral and intellectual powers are benumbed and paralyzed by the gratification of the animal propensities; and it is impossible for the slave of passion to realize the sacred obligation of the law of God, to appreciate the atonement, or to place a right value upon the soul. Goodness, purity, and truth, reverence for God, and love for sacred things—all those holy affections and noble desires that link men with the heavenly world—are consumed in the fires of lust. The soul becomes a blackened and desolate waste, the habitation of evil spirits, and the "cage of every unclean and hateful bird." Beings formed in the image of God are dragged down to a level with the brutes.

It was by associating with idolaters and joining in their festivities that the Hebrews were led to transgress God's law and bring His judgments upon the nation. So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean." 2 Corinthians 6: 17. God requires of His people now as

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great a distinction from the world, in customs, habits, and principles, as He required of Israel anciently. If they faithfully follow the teachings of His Word, this distinction will exist; it cannot be otherwise. The warnings given to the Hebrews against assimilating with the heathen were not more direct or explicit than are those forbidding Christians to conform to the spirit and customs of the ungodly. Christ speaks to us, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4. The followers of Christ are to separate themselves from sinners, choosing their society only when there is opportunity to do them good. We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God. While we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," we are to shun temptation, so far as possible.

It was when the Israelites were in a condition of outward ease and security that they were led into sin. They failed to keep God ever before them, they neglected prayer and cherished a spirit of self-confidence. Ease and self-indulgence left the citadel of the soul unguarded, and debasing thoughts found entrance. It was the traitors within the walls that overthrew the strongholds of principle and betrayed Israel into the power of Satan. It is thus that Satan still seeks to compass the ruin of the soul. A long preparatory process, unknown to the world, goes on in the heart before the Christian commits open sin. The mind does not come down at once from purity and holiness to depravity, corruption, and crime. It takes time to degrade those formed in the image of God to the brutal or the satanic. By beholding we become changed. By the indulgence of impure thoughts man can so educate his mind that sin which he once loathed will become pleasant to him.

Satan is using every means to make crime and debasing vice popular. We cannot walk the streets of our cities without encountering flaring notices of crime presented in some novel, or to be acted at some

theater. The mind is educated to familiarity with sin. The course pursued by the base and vile is kept before the people in the periodicals of the day, and everything that can excite passion is brought before them in exciting stories. They hear and read so much of debasing crime that the once tender conscience, which would have recoiled with horror from such scenes, becomes hardened, and they dwell upon these things with greedy interest.

Many of the amusements popular in the world today, even with those who claim to be Christians, tend to the same end as did those of the heathen. There are indeed few among them that Satan does not turn to account in destroying souls. Through the drama he has worked for ages to excite passion and glorify vice. The opera, with its fascinating display and bewildering music, the masquerade, the dance, the card table, Satan employs to break down the barriers of principle and open the door to sensual indulgence. In every gathering for pleasure where pride is fostered or appetite indulged, where one is led to forget God and lose sight of eternal interests, there Satan is binding his chains about the soul.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence," is the counsel of the wise man; "for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23. As man "thinketh in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7. The heart must be renewed by divine grace, or it will be in vain to seek for purity of life. He who attempts to build up a noble, virtuous character independent of the grace of Christ is building his house upon the shifting sand. In the fierce storms of temptation it will surely be overthrown. David's prayer should be the petition of every soul: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. And having become partakers of the heavenly gift, we are to go on unto perfection, being "kept by the power of God through faith." 1 Peter 1:5.

Yet we have a work to do to resist temptation. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan's devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest. "Gird-

ing up the loins of your mind," says the apostle Peter, "be sober, . . . not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in . . . your ignorance: but like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living." 1 Peter 1:13-15, R.V. Says Paul, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Philippians 4:8. This will require earnest prayer and unceasing watchfulness. We must be aided by the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which will attract the mind upward, and habituate it to dwell on pure and holy things. And we must give diligent study to the Word of God. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." "Thy Word," says the psalmist, "have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." Psalm 119:9, 11.

Israel's sin at Beth-peor brought the judgments of God upon the nation, and though the same sins may not now be punished as speedily, they will as surely meet retribution. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." 1 Corinthians 3:17. Nature has affixed terrible penalties to these crimes—penalties which, sooner or later, will be inflicted upon every transgressor. It is these sins more than any other that have caused the fearful degeneracy of our race, and the weight of disease and misery with which the world is cursed. Men may succeed in concealing their transgression from their fellow men, but they will no less surely reap the result, in suffering, disease, imbecility, or death. And beyond this life stands the tribunal of the judgment, with its award of eternal penalties. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God," but with Satan and evil angels shall have their part in that "lake of fire" which "is the second death." Galatians 5:21; Revelation 20:14.

"The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." Proverbs 5:3, 4. "Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: lest thou give thine

honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labors be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed." Verses 8-11. "Her house inclineth unto death." "None that go unto her return again." Proverbs 2:18, 19. "Her guests are in the depths of hell." Proverbs 9:18.

The Law Repeated

THE Lord announced to Moses that the appointed time for the possession of Canaan was at hand; and as the aged prophet stood upon the heights overlooking the river Jordan and the Promised Land, he gazed with deep interest upon the inheritance of his people. Would it be possible that the sentence pronounced against him for his sin at Kadesh might be revoked? With deep earnestness he pleaded, "O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness, and Thy mighty hand; for what god is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to Thy works, and according to Thy might? I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon." Deuteronomy 3:24-27.

The answer was, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

Without a murmur Moses submitted to the decree of God. And now his great anxiety was for Israel. Who would feel the interest for their welfare that he had felt? From a full heart he poured forth the prayer, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may

This chapter is based on Deuteronomy 4 to 6; 28.

bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd." Numbers 27:16, 17.

The Lord hearkened to the prayer of His servant; and the answer came, "Take thee Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may be obedient." Verses 18-20. Joshua had long attended Moses; and being a man of wisdom, ability, and faith, he was chosen to succeed him.

Through the laying on of hands by Moses, accompanied by a most impressive charge, Joshua was solemnly set apart as the leader of Israel. He was also admitted to a present share in the government. The words of the Lord concerning Joshua came through Moses to the congregation, "He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him, after the judgment of Urim before the Lord. At his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation." Verses 21-23.

Before relinquishing his position as the visible leader of Israel, Moses was directed to rehearse to them the history of their deliverance from Egypt and their journeyings in the wilderness, and also to recapitulate the law spoken from Sinai. When the law was given, but few of the present congregation were old enough to comprehend the awful solemnity of the occasion. As they were soon to pass over Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land, God would present before them the claims of His law and enjoin upon them obedience as the condition of prosperity.

Moses stood before the people to repeat his last warnings and admonitions. His face was illumined with a holy light. His hair was white with age; but his form was erect, his countenance expressed the unabated vigor of health, and his eye was clear and undimmed. It was an important occasion, and with deep feeling he portrayed the love and mercy of their Almighty Protector:

"Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? or hath God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him."

"The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that Jehovah thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations." Deuteronomy 7:7-9.

The people of Israel had been ready to ascribe their troubles to Moses; but now their suspicions that he was controlled by pride, ambition, or selfishness, were removed, and they listened with confidence to his words. Moses faithfully set before them their errors and the transgressions of their fathers. They had often felt impatient and rebellious because of their long wandering in the wilderness; but the Lord had not been chargeable with this delay in possessing Canaan; He was more grieved than they because He could not bring them into immediate possession of the Promised Land, and thus display before all nations His mighty power in the deliverance of His people. With their distrust of God, with their pride and unbelief, they had not been prepared to enter Canaan. They would in no way represent that people whose God is the Lord; for they did not bear His character of

purity, goodness, and benevolence. Had their fathers yielded in faith to the direction of God, being governed by His judgments and walking in His ordinances, they would long before have been settled in Canaan, a prosperous, holy, happy people. Their delay to enter the goodly land dishonored God and detracted from His glory in the sight of surrounding nations.

Moses, who understood the character and value of the law of God, assured the people that no other nation had such wise, righteous, and merciful rules as had been given to the Hebrews. "Behold," he said, "I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

Moses called their attention to the "day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb." And he challenged the Hebrew host: "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" Today the challenge to Israel might be repeated. The laws which God gave His ancient people were wiser, better, and more humane than those of the most civilized nations of the earth. The laws of the nations bear marks of the infirmities and passions of the unrenewed heart; but God's law bears the stamp of the divine.

"The Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace," declared Moses, "to be unto Him a people of inheritance." The land which they were soon to enter, and which was to be theirs on condition of obedience to the law of God, was thus described to them—and how must these words have moved the hearts of Israel, as they remembered that he who so glowingly pictured the blessings of the goodly land had been, through their sin, shut out from sharing the inheritance of his people:

"The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land," "not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven;" "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass;" "a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." Deuteronomy 8:7-9; 11:10-12.

"And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord." "Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God. . . . For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." If they should do evil in the sight of the Lord, then, said Moses, "Ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it."

After the public rehearsal of the law, Moses completed the work of writing all the laws, the statutes, and the judgments which God had given him, and all the regulations concerning the sacrificial system. The book containing these was placed in charge of the proper officers, and was for safe keeping deposited in the side of the ark. Still the great leader was filled with fear that the people would depart from God. In a most sublime and thrilling address he set before them the blessings that would be theirs on condition of obedience, and the curses that would follow upon transgression:

"If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy

God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day," "blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field," in "the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle. . . . Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face. . . . The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto."

"But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee," "and thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee." "And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

By the Spirit of Inspiration, looking far down the ages, Moses pictured the terrible scenes of Israel's final overthrow as a nation, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Rome: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young."

The utter wasting of the land and the horrible suffering of the people during the siege of Jerusalem under Titus centuries later, were

vividly portrayed: "He shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed. . . . And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land. . . . Thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee." "The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, . . . and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates."

Moses closed with these impressive words: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Deuteronomy 30: 19, 20.

The more deeply to impress these truths upon all minds, the great leader embodied them in sacred verse. This song was not only historical, but prophetic. While it recounted the wonderful dealings of God with His people in the past, it also foreshadowed the great events of the future, the final victory of the faithful when Christ shall come the second time in power and glory. The people were directed to commit to memory this poetic history, and to teach it to their children and children's children. It was to be chanted by the congregation when they assembled for worship, and to be repeated by the people as they went about their daily labors. It was the duty of parents to so impress these words upon the susceptible minds of their children that they might never be forgotten.

Since the Israelites were to be, in a special sense, the guardians

and keepers of God's law, the significance of its precepts and the importance of obedience were especially to be impressed upon them, and through them, upon their children and children's children. The Lord commanded concerning His statutes: "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. . . . And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

When their children should ask in time to come, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?" then the parents were to repeat the history of God's gracious dealings with them—how the Lord had wrought for their deliverance that they might obey His law—and to declare to them, "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God as He hath commanded us."



chapter 43

The Death of Moses

IN ALL the dealings of God with His people there is, mingled with His love and mercy, the most striking evidence of His strict and impartial justice. This is exemplified in the history of the Hebrew people. God had bestowed great blessings upon Israel. His loving-kindness toward them is touchingly portrayed: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him." And yet what swift and severe retribution was visited upon them for their transgressions!

The infinite love of God has been manifested in the gift of His only-begotten Son to redeem a lost race. Christ came to the earth to reveal to men the character of His Father, and His life was filled with deeds of divine tenderness and compassion. And yet Christ Himself declares, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." Matthew 5:18. The same voice that with patient, loving entreaty invites the sinner to come to Him and find pardon and peace, will in the judgment bid the rejecters of His mercy, "Depart from Me, ye cursed." Matthew 25:41. In all the Bible, God is represented not only as a tender father but as a righteous judge. Though He delights in showing mercy, and "forgiving iniquity and

This chapter is based on Deuteronomy 31 to 34.

Before his death alone on Mount Nebo, Moses saw in panoramic view the land God had promised Israel.

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transgression and sin," yet He "will by no means clear the guilty." Exodus 34:7.

The great Ruler of nations had declared that Moses was not to lead the congregation of Israel into the goodly land, and the earnest pleading of God's servant could not secure a reversing of His sentence. He knew that he must die. Yet he had not for a moment faltered in his care for Israel. He had faithfully sought to prepare the congregation to enter upon the promised inheritance. At the divine command Moses and Joshua repaired to the tabernacle, while the pillar of cloud came and stood over the door. Here the people were solemnly committed to the charge of Joshua. The work of Moses as leader of Israel was ended. Still he forgot himself in his interest for his people. In the presence of the assembled multitude Moses, in the name of God, addressed to his successor these words of holy cheer: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee." He then turned to the elders and officers of the people, giving them a solemn charge to obey faithfully the instructions he had communicated to them from God.

As the people gazed upon the aged man, so soon to be taken from them, they recalled, with a new and deeper appreciation, his parental tenderness, his wise counsels, and his untiring labors. How often, when their sins had invited the just judgments of God, the prayers of Moses had prevailed with Him to spare them! Their grief was heightened by remorse. They bitterly remembered that their own perversity had provoked Moses to the sin for which he must die.

The removal of their beloved leader would be a far stronger rebuke to Israel than any which they could have received had his life and mission been continued. God would lead them to feel that they were not to make the life of their future leader as trying as they had made that of Moses. God speaks to His people in blessings bestowed; and when these are not appreciated, He speaks to them in blessings removed, that they may be led to see their sins, and return to Him with all the heart.

That very day there came to Moses the command, "Get thee up . . . unto Mount Nebo, . . . and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession: and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people." Moses had often left the camp, in obedience to the divine summons, to commune with God; but he was now to depart on a new and mysterious errand. He must go forth to resign his life into the hands of his Creator. Moses knew that he was to die alone; no earthly friend would be permitted to minister to him in his last hours. There was a mystery and awfulness about the scene before him, from which his heart shrank. The severest trial was his separation from the people of his care and love—the people with whom his interest and his life had so long been united. But he had learned to trust in God, and with unquestioning faith he committed himself and his people to His love and mercy.

For the last time Moses stood in the assembly of his people. Again the Spirit of God rested upon him, and in the most sublime and touching language he pronounced a blessing upon each of the tribes, closing with a benediction upon them all:

"There is none like unto God, O Jeshurun,
 Who rideth upon the heaven for thy help,
 And in His excellency on the skies.
 The eternal God is thy dwelling place,
 And underneath are the everlasting arms:
 And He thrust out the enemy from before thee,
 And said, Destroy.
 And Israel dwelleth in safety,
 The fountain of Jacob alone,
 In a land of corn and wine;
 Yea, His heavens drop down dew.
 Happy art thou, O Israel:
 Who is like unto thee, a people saved by Jehovah,
 The shield of thy help."

Deuteronomy 33:26-29, R.V.

Moses turned from the congregation, and in silence and alone made his way up the mountainside. He went to "the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah." Upon that lonely height he stood, and

gazed with undimmed eye upon the scene spread out before him. Far away to the west lay the blue waters of the Great Sea; in the north, Mount Hermon stood out against the sky; to the east was the tableland of Moab, and beyond lay Bashan, the scene of Israel's triumph; and away to the south stretched the desert of their long wanderings.

In solitude Moses reviewed his life of vicissitudes and hardships since he turned from courtly honors and from a prospective kingdom in Egypt, to cast in his lot with God's chosen people. He called to mind those long years in the desert with the flocks of Jethro, the appearance of the Angel in the burning bush, and his own call to deliver Israel. Again he beheld the mighty miracles of God's power displayed in behalf of the chosen people, and His long-suffering mercy during the years of their wandering and rebellion. Notwithstanding all that God had wrought for them, notwithstanding his own prayers and labors, only two of all the adults in the vast army that left Egypt had been found so faithful that they could enter the Promised Land. As Moses reviewed the result of his labors, his life of trial and sacrifice seemed to have been almost in vain.

Yet he did not regret the burdens he had borne. He knew that his mission and work were of God's own appointing. When first called to become the leader of Israel from bondage, he shrank from the responsibility; but since he had taken up the work he had not cast aside the burden. Even when the Lord had proposed to release him, and destroy rebellious Israel, Moses could not consent. Though his trials had been great, he had enjoyed special tokens of God's favor; he had obtained a rich experience during the sojourn in the wilderness, in witnessing the manifestations of God's power and glory, and in the communion of His love; he felt that he had made a wise decision in choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

As he looked back upon his experience as a leader of God's people, one wrong act marred the record. If that transgression could be blotted out, he felt that he would not shrink from death. He was assured that repentance, and faith in the promised Sacrifice, were all that God

required, and again Moses confessed his sin and implored pardon in the name of Jesus.

And now a panoramic view of the Land of Promise was presented to him. Every part of the country was spread out before him, not faint and uncertain in the dim distance, but standing out clear, distinct, and beautiful to his delighted vision. In this scene it was presented, not as it then appeared, but as it would become, with God's blessing upon it, in the possession of Israel. He seemed to be looking upon a second Eden. There were mountains clothed with cedars of Lebanon, hills gray with olives and fragrant with the odor of the vine, wide green plains bright with flowers and rich in fruitfulness, here the palm trees of the tropics, there waving fields of wheat and barley, sunny valleys musical with the ripple of brooks and the song of birds, goodly cities and fair gardens, lakes rich in "the abundance of the seas," grazing flocks upon the hillsides, and even amid the rocks the wild bee's hoarded treasures. It was indeed such a land as Moses, inspired by the Spirit of God, had described to Israel: "Blessed of the Lord . . . for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, . . . and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, . . . and for the precious things of the earth and fullness thereof."

Moses saw the chosen people established in Canaan, each of the tribes in its own possession. He had a view of their history after the settlement of the Promised Land; the long, sad story of their apostasy and its punishment was spread out before him. He saw them, because of their sins, dispersed among the heathen, the glory departed from Israel, her beautiful city in ruins, and her people captives in strange lands. He saw them restored to the land of their fathers, and at last brought under the dominion of Rome.

He was permitted to look down the stream of time and behold the first advent of our Saviour. He saw Jesus as a babe in Bethlehem. He heard the voices of the angelic host break forth in the glad song of praise to God and peace on earth. He beheld in the heavens the star guiding the Wise Men of the East to Jesus, and a great light flooded

his mind as he recalled those prophetic words, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Numbers 24:17. He beheld Christ's humble life in Nazareth, His ministry of love and sympathy and healing, His rejection by a proud, unbelieving nation. Amazed he listened to their boastful exaltation of the law of God, while they despised and rejected Him by whom the law was given. He saw Jesus upon Olivet as with weeping He bade farewell to the city of His love. As Moses beheld the final rejection of that people so highly blessed of Heaven—that people for whom he had toiled and prayed and sacrificed, for whom he had been willing that his own name should be blotted from the book of life; as he listened to those fearful words, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38), his heart was wrung with anguish, and bitter tears fell from his eyes, in sympathy with the sorrow of the Son of God.

He followed the Saviour to Gethsemane, and beheld the agony in the garden, the betrayal, the mockery and scourging—the crucifixion. Moses saw that as he had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of God must be lifted up, that whosoever would believe on Him "should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:15. Grief, indignation, and horror filled the heart of Moses as he viewed the hypocrisy and satanic hatred manifested by the Jewish nation against their Redeemer, the mighty Angel who had gone before their fathers. He heard Christ's agonizing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Mark 15:34. He saw Him lying in Joseph's new tomb. The darkness of hopeless despair seemed to enshroud the world. But he looked again, and beheld Him coming forth a conqueror, and ascending to heaven escorted by adoring angels and leading a multitude of captives. He saw the shining gates open to receive Him, and the host of heaven with songs of triumph welcoming their Commander. And it was there revealed to him that he himself would be one who should attend the Saviour, and open to Him the everlasting gates. As he looked upon the scene, his countenance shone with a holy radiance. How small appeared the trials and sacrifices of his life when compared with those of the Son of God! how light in contrast with the "far more

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exceeding and eternal weight of glory"! 2 Corinthians 4:17. He rejoiced that he had been permitted, even in a small measure, to be a partaker in the sufferings of Christ.

Moses beheld the disciples of Jesus as they went forth to carry His gospel to the world. He saw that though the people of Israel "according to the flesh" had failed of the high destiny to which God had called them, in their unbelief had failed to become the light of the world, though they had despised God's mercy and forfeited their blessings as His chosen people—yet God had not cast off the seed of Abraham; the glorious purposes which He had undertaken to accomplish through Israel were to be fulfilled. All who through Christ should become the children of faith were to be counted as Abraham's seed; they were inheritors of the covenant promises; like Abraham, they were called to guard and to make known to the world the law of God and the gospel of His Son. Moses saw the light of the gospel shining out through the disciples of Jesus to them "which sat in darkness" (Matthew 4:16), and thousands from the lands of the Gentiles flocking to the brightness of its rising. And beholding, he rejoiced in the increase and prosperity of Israel.

And now another scene passed before him. He had been shown the work of Satan in leading the Jews to reject Christ, while they professed to honor His Father's law. He now saw the Christian world



under a similar deception in professing to accept Christ while they rejected God's law. He had heard from the priests and elders the frenzied cry, "Away with Him!" "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" and now he heard from professedly Christian teachers the cry, "Away with the law!" He saw the Sabbath trodden under foot, and a spurious institution established in its place. Again Moses was filled with astonishment and horror. How could those who believed in Christ reject the law spoken by His own voice upon the sacred mount? How could any that feared God set aside the law which is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth? With joy Moses saw the law of God still honored and exalted by a faithful few. He saw the last great struggle of earthly powers to destroy those who keep God's law. He looked forward to the time when God shall arise to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and those who have feared His name shall be covered and hid in the day of His anger. He heard God's covenant of peace with those who have kept His law, as He utters His voice from His holy habitation and the heavens and the earth do shake. He saw the second coming of Christ in glory, the righteous dead raised to immortal life, and the living saints translated without seeing death, and together ascending with songs of gladness to the City of God.

Still another scene opens to his view—the earth freed from the curse, lovelier than the fair Land of Promise so lately spread out before him. There is no sin, and death cannot enter. There the nations of the saved find their eternal home. With joy unutterable Moses looks upon the scene—the fulfillment of a more glorious deliverance than his brightest hopes have ever pictured. Their earthly wanderings forever past, the Israel of God have at last entered the goodly land.

Again the vision faded, and his eyes rested upon the land of Canaan as it spread out in the distance. Then, like a tired warrior, he lay down to rest. "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher." Many who had been unwilling to heed the counsels of Moses while he was with them would have been

in danger of committing idolatry over his dead body had they known the place of his burial. For this reason it was concealed from men. But angels of God buried the body of His faithful servant and watched over the lonely grave.

"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom Jehovah knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders which Jehovah sent him to do . . . and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel."

Had not the life of Moses been marred with that one sin, in failing to give God the glory of bringing water from the rock at Kadesh, he would have entered the Promised Land, and would have been translated to heaven without seeing death. But he was not long to remain in the tomb. Christ Himself, with the angels who had buried Moses, came down from heaven to call forth the sleeping saint. Satan had exulted at his success in causing Moses to sin against God, and thus come under the dominion of death. The great adversary declared that the divine sentence—"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19)—gave him possession of the dead. The power of the grave had never been broken, and all who were in the tomb he claimed as his captives, never to be released from his dark prison house.

For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead. As the Prince of life and the shining ones approached the grave, Satan was alarmed for his supremacy. With his evil angels he stood to dispute an invasion of the territory that he claimed as his own. He boasted that the servant of God had become his prisoner. He declared that even Moses was not able to keep the law of God; that he had taken to himself the glory due to Jehovah—the very sin which had caused Satan's banishment from heaven—and by transgression had come under the dominion of Satan. The archtraitor reiterated the original charges that he had made against the divine government, and repeated his complaints of God's injustice toward him.

Christ did not stoop to enter into controversy with Satan. He might have brought against him the cruel work which his deceptions had

wrought in heaven, causing the ruin of a vast number of its inhabitants. He might have pointed to the falsehoods told in Eden, that had led to Adam's sin and brought death upon the human race. He might have reminded Satan that it was his own work in tempting Israel to murmuring and rebellion, which had wearied the long-suffering patience of their leader, and in an unguarded moment had surprised him into the sin for which he had fallen under the power of death. But Christ referred all to His Father, saying, "The Lord rebuke thee." Jude 9. The Saviour entered into no dispute with His adversary, but He then and there began His work of breaking the power of the fallen foe, and bringing the dead to life. Here was an evidence that Satan could not controvert, of the supremacy of the Son of God. The resurrection was forever made certain. Satan was despoiled of his prey; the righteous dead would live again.

In consequence of sin Moses had come under the power of Satan. In his own merits he was death's lawful captive; but he was raised to immortal life, holding his title in the name of the Redeemer. Moses came forth from the tomb glorified, and ascended with his Deliverer to the City of God.

Never, till exemplified in the sacrifice of Christ, were the justice and the love of God more strikingly displayed than in His dealings with Moses. God shut Moses out of Canaan, to teach a lesson which should never be forgotten—that He requires exact obedience, and that men are to beware of taking to themselves the glory which is due to their Maker. He could not grant the prayer of Moses that he might share the inheritance of Israel, but He did not forget or forsake His servant. The God of heaven understood the suffering that Moses had endured; He had noted every act of faithful service through those long years of conflict and trial. On the top of Pisgah, God called Moses to an inheritance infinitely more glorious than the earthly Canaan.

Upon the mount of transfiguration Moses was present with Elijah, who had been translated. They were sent as bearers of light and glory from the Father to His Son. And thus the prayer of Moses, uttered so many centuries before, was at last fulfilled. He stood upon the "goodly

mountain," within the heritage of his people, bearing witness to Him in whom all the promises to Israel centered. Such is the last scene revealed to mortal vision in the history of that man so highly honored of Heaven.

Moses was a type of Christ. He himself had declared to Israel, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." Deuteronomy 18:15. God saw fit to discipline Moses in the school of affliction and poverty before he could be prepared to lead the hosts of Israel to the earthly Canaan. The Israel of God, journeying to the heavenly Canaan, have a Captain who needed no human teaching to prepare Him for His mission as a divine leader; yet He was made perfect through sufferings; and "in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:10, 18. Our Redeemer manifested no human weakness or imperfection; yet He died to obtain for us an entrance into the Promised Land.

"And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Hebrews 3:5, 6.



chapter 44

Crossing the Jordan

THE Israelites deeply mourned for their departed leader, and thirty days were devoted to special services in honor of his memory. Never till he was taken from them had they so fully realized the value of his wise counsels, his parental tenderness, and his unswerving faith. With a new and deeper appreciation they recalled the precious lessons he had given while still with them.

Moses was dead, but his influence did not die with him. It was to live on, reproducing itself in the hearts of his people. The memory of that holy, unselfish life would long be cherished, with silent, persuasive power molding the lives even of those who had neglected his living words. As the glow of the descending sun lights up the mountain peaks long after the sun itself has sunk behind the hills, so the works of the pure, the holy, and the good shed light upon the world long after the actors themselves have passed away. Their works, their words, their example, will forever live. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." Psalm 112:6.

While they were filled with grief at their great loss, the people knew that they were not left alone. The pillar of cloud rested over the tabernacle by day, and the pillar of fire by night, an assurance that God would still be their guide and helper if they would walk in the way of His commandments.

This chapter is based on Joshua 1 to 5:12.

As the priests bearing the ark
advanced, God stayed the waters
of Jordan, making a way across.

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Joshua was now the acknowledged leader of Israel. He had been known chiefly as a warrior, and his gifts and virtues were especially valuable at this stage in the history of his people. Courageous, resolute, and persevering, prompt, incorruptible, unmindful of selfish interests in his care for those committed to his charge, and, above all, inspired by a living faith in God—such was the character of the man divinely chosen to conduct the armies of Israel in their entrance upon the Promised Land. During the sojourn in the wilderness he had acted as prime minister to Moses, and by his quiet, unpretending fidelity, his steadfastness when others wavered, his firmness to maintain the truth in the midst of danger, he had given evidence of his fitness to succeed Moses, even before he was called to the position by the voice of God.

It was with great anxiety and self-distrust that Joshua had looked forward to the work before him; but his fears were removed by the assurance of God, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. . . . Unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them." "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses." To the heights of Lebanon in the far distance, to the shores of the Great Sea, and away to the banks of the Euphrates in the east—all was to be theirs.

To this promise was added the injunction, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded." The Lord's direction was, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night;" "turn not from it to the right hand or to the left;" "for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

The Israelites were still encamped on the east side of Jordan, which presented the first barrier to the occupation of Canaan. "Arise," had been the first message of God to Joshua, "go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them." No instruction was given as to the way in which they were to make the pas-

sage. Joshua knew, however, that whatever God should command, He would make a way for His people to perform, and in this faith the intrepid leader at once began his arrangements for an advance.

A few miles beyond the river, just opposite the place where the Israelites were encamped, was the large and strongly fortified city of Jericho. This city was virtually the key to the whole country, and it would present a formidable obstacle to the success of Israel. Joshua therefore sent two young men as spies to visit this city and ascertain something as to its population, its resources, and the strength of its fortifications. The inhabitants of the city, terrified and suspicious, were constantly on the alert, and the messengers were in great danger. They were, however, preserved by Rahab, a woman of Jericho, at the peril of her own life. In return for her kindness they gave her a promise of protection when the city should be taken.

The spies returned in safety with the tidings, "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us." It had been declared to them in Jericho, "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

Orders were now issued to make ready for an advance. The people were to prepare a three days' supply of food, and the army was to be put in readiness for battle. All heartily acquiesced in the plans of their leader and assured him of their confidence and support: "All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as He was with Moses."

Leaving their encampment in the acacia groves of Shittim, the host descended to the border of the Jordan. All knew, however, that

without divine aid they could not hope to make the passage. At this time of the year—in the spring season—the melting snows of the mountains had so raised the Jordan that the river overflowed its banks, making it impossible to cross at the usual fording places. God willed that the passage of Israel over Jordan should be miraculous. Joshua, by divine direction, commanded the people to sanctify themselves; they must put away their sins and free themselves from all outward impurity; “for tomorrow,” he said, “the Lord will do wonders among you.” The “ark of the covenant” was to lead the way before the host. When they should see the token of Jehovah’s presence, borne by the priests, remove from its place in the center of the camp, and advance toward the river, then they were to remove from their place, “and go after it.” The circumstances of the passage were minutely foretold; and said Joshua, “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites. . . . Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.”

At the appointed time began the onward movement, the ark, borne upon the shoulders of the priests, leading the van. The people had been directed to fall back, so that there was a vacant space of more than half a mile about the ark. All watched with deep interest as the priests advanced down the bank of the Jordan. They saw them with the sacred ark move steadily forward toward the angry, surging stream, till the feet of the bearers were dipped into the waters. Then suddenly the tide above was swept back, while the current below flowed on, and the bed of the river was laid bare.

At the divine command the priests advanced to the middle of the channel and stood there while the entire host descended and crossed to the farther side. Thus was impressed upon the minds of all Israel the fact that the power that stayed the waters of Jordan was the same that had opened the Red Sea to their fathers forty years before. When the people had all passed over, the ark itself was borne to the western shore. No sooner had it reached a place of security, and “the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land,” than the imprisoned

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waters, being set free, rushed down, a resistless flood, in the natural channel of the stream.

Coming generations were not to be without a witness to this great miracle. While the priests bearing the ark were still in the midst of Jordan, twelve men previously chosen, one from each tribe, took up each a stone from the riverbed where the priests were standing, and carried it over to the western side. These stones were to be set up as a monument in the first camping place beyond the river. The people were bidden to repeat to their children and children's children the story of the deliverance that God had wrought for them, as Joshua said, "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God forever."

The influence of this miracle, both upon the Hebrews and upon their enemies, was of great importance. It was an assurance to Israel of God's continued presence and protection—an evidence that He would work for them through Joshua as He had wrought through Moses. Such an assurance was needed to strengthen their hearts as



they entered upon the conquest of the land—the stupendous task that had staggered the faith of their fathers forty years before. The Lord had declared to Joshua before the crossing, “This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.” And the result fulfilled the promise. “On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.”

This exercise of divine power in behalf of Israel was designed also to increase the fear with which they were regarded by the surrounding nations, and thus prepare the way for their easier and complete triumph. When the tidings that God had stayed the waters of Jordan before the children of Israel, reached the kings of the Amorites and of the Canaanites, their hearts melted with fear. The Hebrews had already slain the five kings of Midian, the powerful Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og of Bashan, and now the passage over the swollen and impetuous Jordan filled all the surrounding nations with terror. To the Canaanites, to all Israel, and to Joshua himself, unmistakable evidence had been given that the living God, the King of heaven and earth, was among His people, and that He would not fail them nor forsake them.

A short distance from Jordan the Hebrews made their first encampment in Canaan. Here Joshua “circumcised the children of Israel;” “and the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover.” The suspension of the rite of circumcision since the rebellion at Kadesh had been a constant witness to Israel that their covenant with God, of which it was the appointed symbol, had been broken. And the discontinuance of the Passover, the memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, had been an evidence of the Lord’s displeasure at their desire to return to the land of bondage. Now, however, the years of rejection were ended. Once more God acknowledged Israel as His people, and the sign of the covenant was restored. The rite of circumcision was performed upon all the people who had been born in the wilderness. And the Lord declared to Joshua, “This day have I rolled

away the reproach of Egypt from off you," and in allusion to this the place of their encampment was called Gilgal, a "rolling away," or "rolling off."

Heathen nations had reproached the Lord and His people because the Hebrews had failed to take possession of Canaan, as they expected, soon after leaving Egypt. Their enemies had triumphed because Israel had wandered so long in the wilderness, and they had mockingly declared that the God of the Hebrews was not able to bring them into the Promised Land. The Lord had now signally manifested His power and favor in opening the Jordan before His people, and their enemies could no longer reproach them.

"On the fourteenth day of the month at even," the Passover was celebrated on the plains of Jericho. "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the Passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan." The long years of their desert wanderings were ended. The feet of Israel were at last treading the Promised Land.



The Fall of Jericho

THE Hebrews had entered Canaan, but they had not subdued it; and to human appearance the struggle to gain possession of the land must be long and difficult. It was inhabited by a powerful race, who stood ready to oppose the invasion of their territory. The various tribes were bound together by the fear of a common danger. Their horses and iron battle chariots, their knowledge of the country, and their training in war, would give them great advantage. Furthermore, the country was guarded by fortresses—"cities great and fenced up to heaven." Deuteronomy 9:1. Only in the assurance of a strength not their own could the Israelites hope for success in the impending conflict.

One of the strongest fortresses in the land—the large and wealthy city of Jericho—lay just before them, but a little distance from their camp at Gilgal. On the border of a fertile plain abounding with the rich and varied productions of the tropics, its palaces and temples the abode of luxury and vice, this proud city, behind its massive battlements, offered defiance to the God of Israel. Jericho was one of the principal seats of idol worship, being especially devoted to Ashtaroth, the goddess of the moon. Here centered all that was vilest and most degrading in the religion of the Canaanites. The people of Israel, in whose minds were fresh the fearful results of their sin at Beth-peor, could look upon this heathen city only with disgust and horror.

This chapter is based on Joshua 5:13-15; 6; 7.

When the walls of Jericho fell, the soldiers of Israel ran forward and destroyed the enemy completely.

To reduce Jericho was seen by Joshua to be the first step in the conquest of Canaan. But first of all he sought an assurance of divine guidance, and it was granted him. Withdrawing from the encampment to meditate and to pray that the God of Israel would go before His people, he beheld an armed warrior, of lofty stature and commanding presence, "with his sword drawn in his hand." To Joshua's challenge, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" the answer was given, "As Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." The same command given to Moses in Horeb, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy," revealed the true character of the mysterious stranger. It was Christ, the Exalted One, who stood before the leader of Israel. Awe-stricken, Joshua fell upon his face and worshiped, and heard the assurance, "I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor," and he received instruction for the capture of the city.

In obedience to the divine command Joshua marshaled the armies of Israel. No assault was to be made. They were simply to make the circuit of the city, bearing the ark of God and blowing upon trumpets. First came the warriors, a body of chosen men, not now to conquer by their own skill and prowess, but by obedience to the directions given them from God. Seven priests with trumpets followed. Then the ark of God, surrounded by a halo of divine glory, was borne by priests clad in the dress denoting their sacred office. The army of Israel followed, each tribe under its standard. Such was the procession that compassed the doomed city. No sound was heard but the tread of that mighty host and the solemn peal of the trumpets, echoing among the hills and resounding through the streets of Jericho. The circuit completed, the army returned in silence to their tents, and the ark was restored to its place in the tabernacle.

With wonder and alarm the watchmen of the city marked every move, and reported to those in authority. They knew not the meaning of all this display; but when they beheld that mighty host marching around their city once each day, with the sacred ark and the attendant priests, the mystery of the scene struck terror to the hearts of priest

and people. Again they would inspect their strong defenses, feeling certain they could successfully resist the most powerful attack. Many ridiculed the thought that any harm could come to them through these singular demonstrations. Others were awed as they beheld the procession that each day wound about the city. They remembered that the Red Sea had once parted before this people, and that a passage had just been opened for them through the river Jordan. They knew not what further wonders God might work for them.

For six days the host of Israel made the circuit of the city. The seventh day came, and with the first dawn of light, Joshua marshaled the armies of the Lord. Now they were directed to march seven times around Jericho, and at a mighty peal from the trumpets to shout with a loud voice, for God had given them the city.

The vast army marched solemnly around the devoted walls. All was silent, save the measured tread of many feet, and the occasional sound of the trumpet, breaking the stillness of the early morning. The massive walls of solid stone seemed to defy the siege of men. The watchers on the walls looked on with rising fear, as, the first circuit ended, there followed a second, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth. What could be the object of these mysterious movements? What mighty event was impending? They had not long to wait. As the seventh circuit was completed, the long procession paused. The trumpets, which for an interval had been silent, now broke forth in a blast that shook the very earth. The walls of solid stone, with their massive towers and battlements, tottered and heaved from their foundations, and with a crash fell in ruin to the earth. The inhabitants of Jericho were paralyzed with terror, and the hosts of Israel marched in and took possession of the city.

The Israelites had not gained the victory by their own power; the conquest had been wholly the Lord's; and as the first fruits of the land, the city, with all that it contained, was to be devoted as a sacrifice to God. It was to be impressed upon Israel that in the conquest of Canaan they were not to fight for themselves, but simply as instruments to execute the will of God; not to seek for riches or self-exalta-

tion, but the glory of Jehovah their King. Before the capture the command had been given, "The city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein." "Keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed . . . and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it."

All the inhabitants of the city, with every living thing that it contained, "both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass," were put to the sword. Only faithful Rahab, with her household, was spared, in fulfillment of the promise of the spies. The city itself was burned; its palaces and temples, its magnificent dwellings with all their luxurious appointments, the rich draperies and the costly garments, were given to the flames. That which could not be destroyed by fire, "the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron," was to be devoted to the service of the tabernacle. The very site of the city was accursed; Jericho was never to be rebuilt as a stronghold; judgments were threatened upon anyone who should presume to restore the walls that divine power had cast down. The solemn declaration was made in the presence of all Israel, "Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."

The utter destruction of the people of Jericho was but a fulfillment of the commands previously given through Moses concerning the inhabitants of Canaan: "Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them." Deuteronomy 7:2. "Of the cities of these people, . . . thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth." Deuteronomy 20:16. To many these commands seem to be contrary to the spirit of love and mercy enjoined in other portions of the Bible, but they were in truth the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness. God was about to establish Israel in Canaan, to develop among them a nation and government that should be a manifestation of His kingdom upon the earth. They were not only to be inheritors of the true religion, but to disseminate its principles throughout the world. The Canaanites had abandoned themselves to the foulest and most debasing heathenism, and it was

necessary that the land should be cleared of what would so surely prevent the fulfillment of God's gracious purposes.

The inhabitants of Canaan had been granted ample opportunity for repentance. Forty years before, the opening of the Red Sea and the judgments upon Egypt had testified to the supreme power of the God of Israel. And now the overthrow of the kings of Midian, of Gilead and Bashan, had further shown that Jehovah was above all gods. The holiness of His character and His abhorrence of impurity had been evinced in the judgments visited upon Israel for their participation in the abominable rites of Baalpeor. All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab's conviction, though they refused to obey it, that Jehovah, the God of Israel, "is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath." Like the men before the Flood, the Canaanites lived only to blaspheme Heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God and foes to man.

How easily the armies of heaven brought down the walls of Jericho, that proud city whose bulwarks, forty years before, had struck terror to the unbelieving spies! The Mighty One of Israel had said, "I have given into thine hand Jericho." Against that word human strength was powerless.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Hebrews 11:30. The Captain of the Lord's host communicated only with Joshua; He did not reveal Himself to all the congregation, and it rested with them to believe or doubt the words of Joshua, to obey the commands given by him in the name of the Lord, or to deny his authority. *They* could not see the host of angels who attended them under the leadership of the Son of God. They might have reasoned: "What unmeaning movements are these, and how ridiculous the performance of marching daily around the walls of the city, blowing trumpets of rams' horns. This can have no effect upon those towering fortifications." But the very plan of continuing this ceremony through so long a time prior to the final overthrow of the walls afforded opportunity for the develop-

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ment of faith among the Israelites. It was to be impressed upon their minds that their strength was not in the wisdom of man, nor in his might, but only in the God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine Leader.

God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him.

Soon after the fall of Jericho, Joshua determined to attack Ai, a small town among the ravines a few miles to the west of the Jordan Valley. Spies sent to this place brought back the report that the inhabitants were but few, and that only a small force would be needed to overthrow it.

The great victory that God had gained for them had made the Israelites self-confident. Because He had promised them the land of Canaan they felt secure, and failed to realize that divine help alone could give them success. Even Joshua laid his plans for the conquest of Ai without seeking counsel from God.

The Israelites had begun to exalt their own strength and to look with contempt upon their foes. An easy victory was expected, and three thousand men were thought sufficient to take the place. These rushed to the attack without the assurance that God would be with



them. They advanced nearly to the gate of the city, only to encounter the most determined resistance. Panic-stricken at the numbers and thorough preparation of their enemies, they fled in confusion down the steep descent. The Canaanites were in hot pursuit; "they chased them from before the gate, . . . and smote them in the going down." Though the loss was small as to numbers—but thirty-six men being slain—the defeat was disheartening to the whole congregation. "The hearts of the people melted, and became as water." This was the first time they had met the Canaanites in actual battle, and if put to flight before the defenders of this little town, what would be the result in the greater conflicts before them? Joshua looked upon their ill success as an expression of God's displeasure, and in distress and apprehension he "rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."

"Alas, O Lord God," he cried, "wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? . . . O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?"

The answer from Jehovah was, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath . . . transgressed My covenant which I commanded them." It was a time for prompt and decided action, and not for despair and lamentation. There was secret sin in the camp, and it must be searched out and put away before the presence and blessing of the Lord could be with His people. "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

God's command had been disregarded by one of those appointed to execute His judgments. And the nation was held accountable for the guilt of the transgressor: "*They* have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also." Instruction was given to Joshua for the discovery and punishment of the criminal. The lot was to be employed for the detection of the guilty. The sinner was



not directly pointed out, the matter being left in doubt for a time, that the people might feel their responsibility for the sins existing among them, and thus be led to searching of heart and humiliation before God.

Early in the morning, Joshua gathered the people together by their tribes, and the solemn and impressive ceremony began. Step by step the investigation went on. Closer and still closer came the fearful test. First the tribe, then the family, then the household, then the man was taken, and Achan the son of Carmi, of the tribe of Judah, was pointed out by the finger of God as the troubler of Israel.

To establish his guilt beyond all question, leaving no ground for the charge that he had been unjustly condemned, Joshua solemnly adjured Achan to acknowledge the truth. The wretched man made full confession of his crime: "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. . . . When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekel's weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent." Messengers were immediately dispatched to the tent, where they removed the earth at the place specified, and "behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, . . . and laid them out before the Lord."

Sentence was pronounced and immediately executed. "Why hast thou troubled us?" said Joshua, "the Lord shall trouble thee this day." As the people had been held responsible for Achan's sin, and had suffered from its consequences, they were, through their representatives, to take part in its punishment. "All Israel stoned him with stones."

Then there was raised over him a great pile of stones—a witness to the sin and its punishment. "Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor," that is, "trouble." In the book of Chronicles his memorial is written—"Achar, the troubler of Israel." 1 Chronicles 2:7.

Achan's sin was committed in defiance of the most direct and

After solemn investigation Achan
was pointed out by the finger of
God as the troubler of Israel.

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solemn warnings and the most mighty manifestations of God's power. "Keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed," had been the proclamation to all Israel. The command was given immediately after the miraculous passage of the Jordan, and the recognition of God's covenant by the circumcision of the people—after the observance of the Passover, and the appearance of the Angel of the covenant, the Captain of the Lord's host. It had been followed by the overthrow of Jericho, giving evidence of the destruction which will surely overtake all transgressors of God's law. The fact that divine power alone had given the victory to Israel, that they had not come into possession of Jericho by their own strength, gave solemn weight to the command prohibiting them from partaking of the spoils. God, by the might of His own word, had overthrown this stronghold; the conquest was His, and to Him alone the city with all that it contained was to be devoted.

Of the millions of Israel there was but one man who, in that solemn hour of triumph and of judgment, had dared to transgress the command of God. Achan's covetousness was excited by the sight of that costly robe of Shinar; even when it had brought him face to face with death he called it "*a goodly Babylonish garment.*" One sin had led to another, and he appropriated the gold and silver devoted to the treasury of the Lord—he robbed God of the first fruits of the land of Canaan.

The deadly sin that led to Achan's ruin had its root in covetousness, of all sins one of the most common and the most lightly regarded. While other offenses meet with detection and punishment, how rarely does the violation of the tenth commandment so much as call forth censure. The enormity of this sin, and its terrible results, are the lessons of Achan's history.

Covetousness is an evil of gradual development. Achan had cherished greed of gain until it became a habit, binding him in fetters well-nigh impossible to break. While fostering this evil, he would have been filled with horror at the thought of bringing disaster upon Israel; but his perceptions were deadened by sin, and when temptation came, he fell an easy prey.

Are not similar sins still committed, in the face of warnings as solemn and explicit? We are as directly forbidden to indulge covetousness as was Achan to appropriate the spoils of Jericho. God has declared it to be idolatry. We are warned, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matthew 6:24. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." Luke 12:15. "Let it not be once named among you." Ephesians 5:3. We have before us the fearful doom of Achan, of Judas, of Ananias and Sapphira. Back of all these we have that of Lucifer, the "son of the morning," who, coveting a higher state, forfeited forever the brightness and bliss of heaven. And yet, notwithstanding all these warnings, covetousness abounds.

Everywhere its slimy track is seen. It creates discontent and dissension in families; it excites envy and hatred in the poor against the rich; it prompts the grinding oppression of the rich toward the poor. And this evil exists not in the world alone, but in the church. How common even here to find selfishness, avarice, overreaching, neglect of charities, and robbery of God "in tithes and offerings." Among church members "in good and regular standing" there are, alas! many Achans. Many a man comes stately to church, and sits at the table of the Lord, while among his possessions are hidden unlawful gains, the things that God has cursed. For a goodly Babylonish garment, multitudes sacrifice the approval of conscience and their hope of heaven. Multitudes barter their integrity, and their capabilities for usefulness, for a bag of silver shekels. The cries of the suffering poor are unheeded; the gospel light is hindered in its course; the scorn of worldlings is kindled by practices that give the lie to the Christian profession; and yet the covetous professor continues to heap up treasures. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me" (Malachi 3:8), saith the Lord.

Achan's sin brought disaster upon the whole nation. For one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away. The influence most to be feared by the church is not that of open opposers, infidels, and blasphemers, but of inconsistent professors of Christ. These are the ones that keep back

the blessing of the God of Israel and bring weakness upon His people.

When the church is in difficulty, when coldness and spiritual declension exist, giving occasion for the enemies of God to triumph, then, instead of folding their hands and lamenting their unhappy state, let its members inquire if there is not an Achan in the camp. With humiliation and searching of heart, let each seek to discover the hidden sins that shut out God's presence.

Achan acknowledged his guilt, but when it was too late for the confession to benefit himself. He had seen the armies of Israel return from Ai defeated and disheartened; yet he did not come forward and confess his sin. He had seen Joshua and the elders of Israel bowed to the earth in grief too great for words. Had he then made confession, he would have given some proof of true penitence; but he still kept silence. He had listened to the proclamation that a great crime had been committed, and had even heard its character definitely stated. But his lips were sealed. Then came the solemn investigation. How his soul thrilled with terror as he saw his tribe pointed out, then his family and his household! But still he uttered no confession, until the finger of God was placed upon him. Then, when his sin could no longer be concealed, he admitted the truth. How often are similar confessions made. There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God. Achan would not have confessed had he not hoped by so doing to avert the consequences of his crime. But his confession only served to show that his punishment was just. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no change of purpose, no abhorrence of evil.

So confessions will be made by the guilty when they stand before the bar of God, after every case has been decided for life or death. The consequences to result to himself will draw from each an acknowledgment of his sin. It will be forced from the soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. But such confessions cannot save the sinner.

So long as they can conceal their transgressions from their fellow

men, many, like Achan, feel secure, and flatter themselves that God will not be strict to mark iniquity. All too late their sins will find them out in that day when they shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering forever. When the records of heaven shall be opened, the Judge will not in words declare to man his guilt, but will cast one penetrating, convicting glance, and every deed, every transaction of life, will be vividly impressed upon the memory of the wrongdoer. The person will not, as in Joshua's day, need to be hunted out from tribe to family, but his own lips will confess his shame. The sins hidden from the knowledge of men will then be proclaimed to the whole world.

The Blessings and the Curses

AFTER the execution of the sentence upon Achan, Joshua was commanded to marshal all the men of war and again advance against Ai. The power of God was with His people, and they were soon in possession of the city.

Military operations were now suspended, that all Israel might engage in a solemn religious service. The people were eager to obtain a settlement in Canaan; as yet they had not homes or lands for their families, and in order to gain these they must drive out the Canaanites; but this important work must be deferred, for a higher duty demanded their first attention.

Before taking possession of their inheritance, they must renew their covenant of loyalty to God. In the last instructions of Moses, direction had been twice given for a convocation of the tribes upon Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, at Shechem, for the solemn recognition of the law of God. In obedience to these injunctions the whole people, not only men, but "the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them" left their camp at Gilgal, and marched through the country of their enemies, to the vale of Shechem, near the center of the land. Though surrounded by unconquered foes, they were safe under the protection of God as long as they were faithful to Him. Now, as in the days of Jacob, "the terror of God was upon the

This chapter is based on Joshua 8.

cities that were round about them" (Genesis 35:5), and the Hebrews were unmolested.

The place appointed for this solemn service was one already sacred from its association with the history of their fathers. It was here that Abraham raised his first altar to Jehovah in the land of Canaan. Here both Abraham and Jacob had pitched their tents. Here the latter bought the field in which the tribes were to bury the body of Joseph. Here also was the well that Jacob had dug, and the oak under which he had buried the idolatrous images of his household.

The spot chosen was one of the most beautiful in all Palestine, and worthy to be the theater where this grand and impressive scene was to be enacted. The lovely valley, its green fields dotted with olive groves, watered with brooks from living fountains, and gemmed with wild flowers, spread out invitingly between the barren hills. Ebal and Gerizim, upon opposite sides of the valley, nearly approach each other, their lower spurs seeming to form a natural pulpit, every word spoken on one being distinctly audible on the other, while the mountainsides, receding, afford space for a vast assemblage.

According to the directions given by Moses, a monument of great stones was erected upon Mount Ebal. Upon these stones, previously prepared by a covering of plaster, the law was inscribed—not only the ten precepts spoken from Sinai and engraved on the tables of stone, but the laws communicated to Moses, and by him written in a book. Beside this monument was built an altar of unhewn stone, upon which sacrifices were offered unto the Lord. The fact that the altar was set up on Mount Ebal, the mountain upon which the curse was put, was significant, denoting that because of their transgressions of God's law, Israel had justly incurred His wrath, and that it would be at once visited, but for the atonement of Christ, represented by the altar of sacrifice.

Six of the tribes—all descended from Leah and Rachel—were stationed upon Mount Gerizim; while those that descended from the handmaids, together with Reuben and Zebulun, took their position on Ebal, the priests with the ark occupying the valley between them.

I

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

II

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE, OR ANY LIKENESS OF ANY THING THAT IS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, OR THAT IS IN THE EARTH BENEATH, OR THAT IS IN THE WATER UNDER THE EARTH: THOU SHALT NOT BOW DOWN THYSELF TO THEM, NOR SERVE THEM: FOR I THE LORD THY GOD AM A JEALOUS GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME, AND SHEWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE ME, AND KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.

III

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN; FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTYLESS THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN.

IV

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY. SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR, AND DO ALL THY WORK: BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS THE SABBATH OF THE LORD THY GOD: IN IT THOU SHALT NOT DO ANY WORK, THOU, NOR THY SON, NOR THY DAUGHTER, THY MANSERVANT, NOR THY MAIDSERVANT, NOR THY CATTLE, NOR THY STRANGER THAT IS WITHIN THY GATES: FOR IN SIX DAYS THE LORD MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH, THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IN THEM IS, AND RESTED THE SEVENTH DAY: THEREFORE THE LORD BLESSED THE SABBATH DAY, AND HALLOWED IT.

V

HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER: THAT THY DAYS MAY BE LONG UPON THE LAND WHICH THE LORD THY GOD GIVETH THEE.

VI

THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

VII

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

VIII

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

IX

THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR.

X

THOU SHALT NOT COVERT THY NEIGHBOUR'S HOUSE, THOU SHALT NOT COVERT THY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE, NOR HIS MANSERVANT, NOR HIS MAIDSERVANT, NOR HIS OX, NOR HIS ASS, NOR ANY THING THAT IS THY NEIGHBOUR'S.

Silence was proclaimed by the sound of the signal trumpet; and then in the deep stillness, and in the presence of this vast assembly, Joshua, standing beside the sacred ark, read the blessings that were to follow obedience to God's law. All the tribes on Gerizim responded by an Amen. He then read the curses, and the tribes on Ebal in like manner gave their assent, thousands upon thousands of voices uniting as the voice of one man in the solemn response. Following this came the reading of the law of God, together with the statutes and judgments that had been delivered to them by Moses.

Israel had received the law directly from the mouth of God at Sinai; and its sacred precepts, written by His own hand, were still preserved in the ark. Now it had been again written where all could read it. All had the privilege of seeing for themselves the conditions of the covenant under which they were to hold possession of Canaan. All were to signify their acceptance of the terms of the covenant and give their assent to the blessings or curses for its observance or neglect. The law was not only written upon the memorial stones, but was read by Joshua himself in the hearing of all Israel. It had not been many weeks since Moses gave the whole book of Deuteronomy in discourses to the people, yet now Joshua read the law again.

Not alone the men of Israel, but "all the women and the little ones" listened to the reading of the law; for it was important that they also should know and do their duty. God had commanded Israel concerning His statutes: "Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, . . . that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth." Deuteronomy 11:18-21.

Every seventh year the whole law was to be read in the assembly of all Israel, as Moses commanded: "At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which

God honored the Hebrew nation by
giving them His law to be held in
sacred trust for all the world.

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He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it." Deuteronomy 31:10-13.

Satan is ever at work endeavoring to pervert what God has spoken, to blind the mind and darken the understanding, and thus lead men into sin. This is why the Lord is so explicit, making His requirements so very plain that none need err. God is constantly seeking to draw men close under His protection, that Satan may not practice his cruel, deceptive power upon them. He has condescended to speak to them with His own voice, to write with His own hand the living oracles. And these blessed words, all instinct with life and luminous with truth, are committed to men as a perfect guide. Because Satan is so ready to catch away the mind and divert the affections from the Lord's promises and requirements, the greater diligence is needed to fix them in the mind and impress them upon the heart.

Greater attention should be given by religious teachers to instructing the people in the facts and lessons of Bible history and the warnings and requirements of the Lord. These should be presented in simple language, adapted to the comprehension of children. It should be a part of the work both of ministers and parents to see that the young are instructed in the Scriptures.

Parents can and should interest their children in the varied knowledge found in the sacred pages. But if they would interest their sons and daughters in the Word of God, they must be interested in it themselves. They must be familiar with its teachings, and, as God commanded Israel, speak of it, "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deuteronomy 11:19. Those who desire their children to love and reverence God must talk of His goodness, His majesty, and

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His power, as revealed in His Word and in the works of creation.

Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men. We should bind its precepts as signs upon our hands and as frontlets between our eyes. If studied and obeyed, it would lead God's people, as the Israelites were led, by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.



League With the Gibeonites

FROM Shechem the Israelites returned to their encampment at Gilgal. Here they were soon after visited by a strange deputation, who desired to enter into treaty with them. The ambassadors represented that they had come from a distant country, and this seemed to be confirmed by their appearance. Their clothing was old and worn, their sandals were patched, their provisions moldy, and the skins that served them for wine bottles were rent and bound up, as if hastily repaired on the journey.

In their far-off home—professedly beyond the limits of Palestine—their fellow countrymen, they said, had heard of the wonders which God had wrought for His people, and had sent them to make a league with Israel. The Hebrews had been specially warned against entering into any league with the idolaters of Canaan, and a doubt as to the truth of the strangers' words arose in the minds of the leaders. "Peradventure ye dwell among us," they said. To this the ambassadors only replied, "We are thy servants." But when Joshua directly demanded of them, "Who are ye? and from whence come ye?" they reiterated their former statement, and added, in proof of their sincerity, "This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is moldy: and these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new;

This chapter is based on Joshua 9 and 10.

The Gibeonites pretended that they had made a long journey to the camp, and Israel's leaders were deceived.

and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey."

These representations prevailed. The Hebrews "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them." Thus the treaty was entered into. Three days afterward the truth was discovered. "They heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them." Knowing that it was impossible to resist the Hebrews, the Gibeonites had resorted to stratagem to preserve their lives.

Great was the indignation of the Israelites as they learned the deception that had been practiced upon them. And this was heightened when, after three days' journey, they reached the cities of the Gibeonites, near the center of the land. "All the congregation murmured against the princes;" but the latter refused to break the treaty, though secured by fraud, because they had "sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel." "And the children of Israel smote them not." The Gibeonites had pledged themselves to renounce idolatry, and accept the worship of Jehovah; and the preservation of their lives was not a violation of God's command to destroy the idolatrous Canaanites. Hence the Hebrews had not by their oath pledged themselves to commit sin. And though the oath had been secured by deception, it was not to be disregarded. The obligation to which one's word is pledged—if it do not bind him to perform a wrong act—should be held sacred. No consideration of gain, of revenge, or of self-interest can in any way affect the inviolability of an oath or pledge. "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 12:22. He that "shall ascend into the hill of the Lord," and "stand in His holy place," is "he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Psalms 24:3; 15:4.

The Gibeonites were permitted to live, but were attached as bondmen to the sanctuary, to perform all menial services. "Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord." These conditions they gratefully accepted, conscious that they had been at fault, and glad to purchase

life on any terms. "Behold, we are in thine hand," they said to Joshua; "as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do." For centuries their descendants were connected with the service of the sanctuary.

The territory of the Gibeonites comprised four cities. The people were not under the rule of a king, but were governed by elders, or senators. Gibeon, the most important of their towns, "was a great city, as one of the royal cities," "and all the men thereof were mighty." It is a striking evidence of the terror with which the Israelites had inspired the inhabitants of Canaan, that the people of such a city should have resorted to so humiliating an expedient to save their lives.

But it would have fared better with the Gibeonites had they dealt honestly with Israel. While their submission to Jehovah secured the preservation of their lives, their deception brought them only disgrace and servitude. God had made provision that all who would renounce heathenism, and connect themselves with Israel, should share the blessings of the covenant. They were included under the term, "the stranger that sojourneth among you," and with few exceptions this class were to enjoy equal favors and privileges with Israel. The Lord's direction was—

"If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself." Leviticus 19:33, 34. Concerning the Passover and the offering of sacrifices it was commanded, "One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you: . . . as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord." Numbers 15:15.

Such was the footing on which the Gibeonites might have been received, but for the deception to which they had resorted. It was no light humiliation to those citizens of a "royal city," "all the men whereof were mighty," to be made hewers of wood and drawers of water throughout their generations. But they had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude. Thus through all their generations

their servile condition would testify to God's hatred of falsehood.

The submission of Gibeon to the Israelites filled the kings of Canaan with dismay. Steps were at once taken for revenge upon those who had made peace with the invaders. Under the leadership of Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, five of the Canaanite kings entered into a confederacy against Gibeon. Their movements were rapid. The Gibeonites were unprepared for defense, and they sent a message to Joshua at Gilgal: "Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us." The danger threatened not the people of Gibeon alone, but also Israel. This city commanded the passes to central and southern Palestine, and it must be held if the country was to be conquered.

Joshua prepared to go at once to the relief of Gibeon. The inhabitants of the besieged city had fear that he would reject their appeal, because of the fraud which they had practiced; but since they had submitted to the control of Israel, and had accepted the worship of God, he felt himself under obligation to protect them. He did not this time move without divine counsel, and the Lord encouraged him in the undertaking. "Fear them not," was the divine message; "for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee." "So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor."

By marching all night he brought his forces before Gibeon in the morning. Scarcely had the confederate princes mustered their armies about the city when Joshua was upon them. The attack resulted in the utter discomfiture of the assailants. The immense host fled before Joshua up the mountain pass to Beth-horon; and having gained the height, they rushed down the precipitous descent upon the other side. Here a fierce hailstorm burst upon them. "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven: . . . they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword."

While the Amorites were continuing their headlong flight, intent on finding refuge in the mountain strongholds, Joshua, looking down

from the ridge above, saw that the day would be too short for the accomplishment of his work. If not fully routed, their enemies would again rally, and renew the struggle. "Then spake Joshua to the Lord, . . . and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . . The sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day."

Before the evening fell, God's promise to Joshua had been fulfilled. The entire host of the enemy had been given into his hand. Long were the events of that day to remain in the memory of Israel. "There was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of Thine arrows they went, and at the shining of Thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people." Habakkuk 3:11-13.

The Spirit of God inspired Joshua's prayer, that evidence might again be given of the power of Israel's God. Hence the request did not show presumption on the part of the great leader. Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm. The man who commanded, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon," is the man who for hours lay prostrate upon the earth in prayer in the camp at Gilgal. The men of prayer are the men of power.

This mighty miracle testifies that the creation is under the control of the Creator. Satan seeks to conceal from men the divine agency in the physical world—to keep out of sight the unwearied working of

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the first great cause. In this miracle all who exalt nature above the God of nature stand rebuked.

At His own will God summons the forces of nature to overthrow the might of His enemies—"fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling His word." Psalm 148:8. When the heathen Amorites had set themselves to resist His purposes, God interposed, casting down "great stones from heaven" upon the enemies of Israel. We are told of a greater battle to take place in the closing scenes of earth's history, when "Jehovah hath opened His armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of His indignation." Jeremiah 50:25. "Hast thou," he inquires, "entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" Job 38:22, 23.

The revelator describes the destruction that is to take place when the "great voice out of the temple of heaven" announces, "It is done." He says, "There fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent." Revelation 16:17, 21.

The Division of Canaan

THE victory at Beth-horon was speedily followed by the conquest of southern Canaan. "Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale. . . . And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp at Gilgal."

The tribes of northern Palestine, terrified at the success which had attended the armies of Israel, now entered into a league against them. At the head of this confederacy was Jabin, king of Hazor, a territory to the west of Lake Merom. "And they went out, they and all their hosts with them." This army was much larger than any that the Israelites had before encountered in Canaan—"much people, even as the sand that is upon the seashore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel." Again a message of encouragement was given to Joshua: "Be not afraid because of them: for tomorrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel."

Near Lake Merom he fell upon the camp of the allies and utterly routed their forces. "The Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them . . . until they left them none remaining." The chariots and horses that had been the pride and boast

This chapter is based on Joshua 10:40-43; 11; 14 to 22.

of the Canaanites were not to be appropriated by Israel. At the command of God the chariots were burned, and the horses lamed, and thus rendered unfit for use in battle. The Israelites were not to put their trust in chariots or horses, but "in the name of the Lord their God."

One by one the cities were taken, and Hazor, the stronghold of the confederacy, was burned. The war was continued for several years, but its close found Joshua master of Canaan. "And the land had rest from war."

But though the power of the Canaanites had been broken, they had not been fully dispossessed. On the west the Philistines still held a fertile plain along the seacoast, while north of them was the territory of the Sidonians. Lebanon also was in the possession of the latter people; and to the south, toward Egypt, the land was still occupied by the enemies of Israel.

Joshua was not, however, to continue the war. There was another work for the great leader to perform before he should relinquish the command of Israel. The whole land, both the parts already conquered and that which was yet unsubdued, was to be apportioned among the tribes. And it was the duty of each tribe to fully subdue its own inheritance. If the people should prove faithful to God, He would drive out their enemies from before them; and He promised to give them still greater possessions if they would but be true to His covenant.

To Joshua, with Eleazar the high priest, and the heads of the tribes, the distribution of the land was committed, the location of each tribe being determined by lot. Moses himself had fixed the bounds of the country as it was to be divided among the tribes when they should come in possession of Canaan, and had appointed a prince from each tribe to attend to the distribution. The tribe of Levi, being devoted to the sanctuary service, was not counted in this allotment; but forty-eight cities in different parts of the country were assigned the Levites as their inheritance.

Before the distribution of the land had been entered upon, Caleb, accompanied by the heads of his tribe, came forward with a special claim. Except Joshua, Caleb was now the oldest man in Israel. Caleb

and Joshua were the only ones among the spies who had brought a good report of the Land of Promise, encouraging the people to go up and possess it in the name of the Lord. Caleb now reminded Joshua of the promise then made, as the reward of his faithfulness: "The land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord." He therefore presented a request that Hebron be given him for a possession. Here had been for many years the home of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and here, in the cave of Machpelah, they were buried. Hebron was the seat of the dreaded Anakim, whose formidable appearance had so terrified the spies, and through them destroyed the courage of all Israel. This, above all others, was the place which Caleb, trusting in the strength of God, chose for his inheritance.

"Behold, the Lord hath kept me alive," he said, "these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses: . . . and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." This request was supported by the chief men of Judah. Caleb himself being the one appointed from this tribe to apportion the land, he had chosen to unite these men with him in presenting his claim, that there might be no appearance of having employed his authority for selfish advantage.

His claim was immediately granted. To none could the conquest of this giant stronghold be more safely entrusted. "Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance," "because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." Caleb's faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God's promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed

the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off. Amid all the hardships, perils, and plagues of the desert wanderings, and during the years of warfare since entering Canaan, the Lord had preserved him; and now at upwards of fourscore his vigor was unabated. He did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. By the help of God he would wrest his stronghold from the very giants whose power had staggered the faith of Israel. It was no desire for honor or aggrandizement that prompted Caleb's request. The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable.

Caleb obtained the inheritance upon which his heart had been set for forty years, and, trusting in God to be with him, he "drove thence the three sons of Anak." Having thus secured a possession for himself and his house, his zeal did not abate; he did not settle down to enjoy his inheritance, but pushed on to further conquests for the benefit of the nation and the glory of God.

The cowards and rebels had perished in the wilderness, but the righteous spies ate of the grapes of Eschol. To each was given according to his faith. The unbelieving had seen their fears fulfilled. Notwithstanding God's promise, they had declared that it was impossible to inherit Canaan, and they did not possess it. But those who trusted in God, looking not so much to the difficulties to be encountered as to the strength of their Almighty Helper, entered the goodly land. It was through faith that the ancient worthies "subdued kingdoms, . . . escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Hebrews 11:33, 34. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4.



Another claim concerning the division of the land revealed a spirit widely different from that of Caleb. It was presented by the children of Joseph, the tribe of Ephraim with the half tribe of Manasseh. In consideration of their superior numbers, these tribes demanded a double portion of territory. The lot designated for them was the richest in the land, including the fertile plain of Sharon; but many of the principal towns in the valley were still in possession of the Canaanites, and the tribes shrank from the toil and danger of conquering their possessions, and desired an additional portion in territory already subdued. The tribe of Ephraim was one of the largest in Israel, as well as the one to which Joshua himself belonged, and its members naturally regarded themselves as entitled to special consideration. "Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit," they said, "seeing I am a great people?" But no departure from strict justice could be won from the inflexible leader.

His answer was, "If thou be a great people, then get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee."

Their reply showed the real cause of complaint. They lacked faith and courage to drive out the Canaanites. "The hill is not enough for us," they said; "and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron."

The power of the God of Israel had been pledged to His people, and had the Ephraimites possessed the courage and faith of Caleb, no enemy could have stood before them. Their evident desire to shun hardship and danger was firmly met by Joshua. "Thou art a great people, and hast great power," he said; "thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong." Thus their own arguments were turned against them. Being a great people, as they claimed, they were fully able to make their own way, as did their brethren. With the help of God they need not fear the chariots of iron.

Heretofore Gilgal had been the headquarters of the nation and the seat of the tabernacle. But now the tabernacle was to be removed

to the place chosen for its permanent location. This was Shiloh, a little town in the lot of Ephraim. It was near the center of the land, and was easy of access to all the tribes. Here a portion of country had been thoroughly subdued, so that the worshipers would not be molested. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there." The tribes that were still encamped when the tabernacle was removed from Gilgal followed it, and pitched near Shiloh. Here these tribes remained until they dispersed to their possessions.

The ark remained at Shiloh for three hundred years, until, because of the sins of Eli's house, it fell into the hands of the Philistines, and Shiloh was ruined. The ark was never returned to the tabernacle here, the sanctuary service was finally transferred to the temple at Jerusalem, and Shiloh fell into insignificance. There are only ruins to mark the spot where it once stood. Long afterward its fate was made use of as a warning to Jerusalem. "Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh," the Lord declared by the prophet Jeremiah, "where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. . . . Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh." Jeremiah 7:12-14.

"When they had made an end of dividing the land," and all the tribes had been allotted their inheritance, Joshua presented his claim. To him, as to Caleb, a special promise of inheritance had been given; yet he asked for no extensive province, but only a single city. "They gave him the city which he asked, . . . and he built the city, and dwelt therein." The name given to the city was Timnath-serah, "the portion that remains"—a standing testimony to the noble character and unselfish spirit of the conqueror, who, instead of being the first to appropriate the spoils of conquest, deferred his claim until the humblest of his people had been served.

Six of the cities assigned to the Levites—three on each side the Jordan—were appointed as cities of refuge, to which the manslayer

might flee for safety. The appointment of these cities had been commanded by Moses, "that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge," he said, "that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment." Numbers 35:11, 12. This merciful provision was rendered necessary by the ancient custom of private vengeance, by which the punishment of the murderer devolved on the nearest relative or the next heir of the deceased. In cases where guilt was clearly evident it was not necessary to wait for a trial by the magistrates. The avenger might pursue the criminal anywhere and put him to death wherever he should be found. The Lord did not see fit to abolish this custom at that time, but He made provision to ensure the safety of those who should take life unintentionally.

The cities of refuge were so distributed as to be within a half day's journey of every part of the land. The roads leading to them were always to be kept in good repair; all along the way signposts were to be erected bearing the word "Refuge" in plain, bold characters, that the fleeing one might not be delayed for a moment. Any person—Hebrew, stranger, or sojourner—might avail himself of this provision. But while the guiltless were not to be rashly slain, neither were the guilty to escape punishment. The case of the fugitive was to be fairly tried by the proper authorities, and only when found innocent of intentional murder was he to be protected in the city of refuge. The guilty were given up to the avenger. And those who were entitled to protection could receive it only on condition of remaining within the appointed refuge. Should one wander away beyond the prescribed limits, and be found by the avenger of blood, his life would pay the penalty of his disregard of the Lord's provision. At the death of the high priest, however, all who had sought shelter in the cities of refuge were at liberty to return to their possessions.

In a trial for murder the accused was not to be condemned on the testimony of one witness, even though circumstantial evidence might be strong against him. The Lord's direction was, "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses:

but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die." Numbers 35:30. It was Christ who gave to Moses these directions for Israel; and when personally with His disciples on earth, as He taught them how to treat the erring, the Great Teacher repeated the lesson that one man's testimony is not to acquit or condemn. One man's views and opinions are not to settle disputed questions. In all these matters two or more are to be associated, and together they are to bear the responsibility, "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." Matthew 18:16.

If the one tried for murder were proved guilty, no atonement or ransom could rescue him. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Genesis 9:6. "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death." "Thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die," was the command of God; "the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it." Numbers 35:31, 33; Exodus 21:14. The safety and purity of the nation demanded that the sin of murder be severely punished. Human life, which God alone could give, must be sacredly guarded.

The cities of refuge appointed for God's ancient people were a symbol of the refuge provided in Christ. The same merciful Saviour who appointed those temporal cities of refuge has by the shedding of His own blood provided for the transgressors of God's law a sure retreat, into which they may flee for safety from the second death. No power can take out of His hands the souls that go to Him for pardon. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us;" that "we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Romans 8:1, 34; Hebrews 6:18.

He who fled to the city of refuge could make no delay. Family and employment were left behind. There was no time to say farewell to loved ones. His life was at stake, and every other interest must be

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sacrificed to the one purpose—to reach the place of safety. Weariness was forgotten, difficulties were unheeded. The fugitive dared not for one moment slacken his pace until he was within the wall of the city.

The sinner is exposed to eternal death, until he finds a hiding place in Christ; and as loitering and carelessness might rob the fugitive of his only chance for life, so delays and indifference may prove the ruin of the soul. Satan, the great adversary, is on the track of every transgressor of God's holy law, and he who is not sensible of his danger, and does not earnestly seek shelter in the eternal refuge, will fall a prey to the destroyer.

The prisoner who at any time went outside the city of refuge was abandoned to the avenger of blood. Thus the people were taught to adhere to the methods which infinite wisdom appointed for their security. Even so, it is not enough that the sinner *believe* in Christ for the pardon of sin; he must, by faith and obedience, *abide* in Him. "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Hebrews 10:26, 27.

Two of the tribes of Israel, Gad and Reuben, with half the tribe of Manasseh, had received their inheritance before crossing the Jordan. To a pastoral people, the wide upland plains and rich forests of Gilead and Bashan, offering extensive grazing land for their flocks and herds, had attractions which were not to be found in Canaan itself, and the two and a half tribes, desiring to settle here, had pledged themselves to furnish their proportion of armed men to accompany their brethren across the Jordan and to share their battles till they also should enter upon their inheritance. The obligation had been faithfully discharged. When the ten tribes entered Canaan forty thousand of "the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manassch . . . prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto battle, to the plains of Jericho." Joshua 4:12, 13. For years they had fought bravely by the side of their brethren. Now the time had

come for them to get unto the land of their possession. As they had united with their brethren in the conflicts, so they had shared the spoils; and they returned "with much riches . . . and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment," all of which they were to share with those who had remained with the families and flocks.

They were now to dwell at a distance from the sanctuary of the Lord, and it was with an anxious heart that Joshua witnessed their departure, knowing how strong would be the temptations, in their isolated and wandering life, to fall into the customs of the heathen tribes that dwelt upon their borders.

While the minds of Joshua and other leaders were still oppressed with anxious forebodings, strange tidings reached them. Beside the Jordan, near the place of Israel's miraculous passage of the river, the two and a half tribes had erected a great altar, similar to the altar of burnt offering at Shiloh. The law of God prohibited, on pain of death, the establishment of another worship than that at the sanctuary. If such was the object of this altar, it would, if permitted to remain, lead the people away from the true faith.

The representatives of the people assembled at Shiloh, and in the heat of their excitement and indignation proposed to make war at once upon the offenders. Through the influence of the more cautious, however, it was decided to send first a delegation to obtain from the two and a half tribes an explanation of their conduct. Ten princes, one from each tribe, were chosen. At their head was Phinehas, who had distinguished himself by his zeal in the matter of Peor.

The two and a half tribes had been at fault in entering, without explanation, upon an act open to such grave suspicions. The ambassadors, taking it for granted that their brethren were guilty, met them with sharp rebuke. They accused them of rebelling against the Lord, and bade them remember how judgments had been visited upon Israel for joining themselves to Baalpeor. In behalf of all Israel, Phinehas stated to the children of Gad and Reuben that if they were unwilling to abide in that land without an altar for sacrifice, they would be

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welcome to a share in the possessions and privileges of their brethren on the other side.

In reply the accused explained that their altar was not intended for sacrifice, but simply as a witness that, although separated by the river, they were of the same faith as their brethren in Canaan. They had feared that in future years their children might be excluded from the tabernacle, as having no part in Israel. Then this altar, erected after the pattern of the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, would be a witness that its builders were also worshipers of the living God.

With great joy the ambassadors accepted this explanation, and immediately carried back the tidings to those who sent them. All thoughts of war were dismissed, and the people united in rejoicing, and praise to God.

The children of Gad and Reuben now placed upon their altar an inscription pointing out the purpose for which it was erected; and they said, "It shall be a witness between us that Jehovah is God." Thus they endeavored to prevent future misapprehension and to remove what might be a cause of temptation.

How often serious difficulties arise from a simple misunderstanding, even among those who are actuated by the worthiest motives; and without the exercise of courtesy and forbearance, what serious and even fatal results may follow. The ten tribes remembered how, in Achan's case, God had rebuked the lack of vigilance to discover the sins existing among them. Now they resolved to act promptly and earnestly; but in seeking to shun their first error, they had gone to the opposite extreme. Instead of making courteous inquiry to learn the facts in the case, they had met their brethren with censure and condemnation. Had the men of Gad and Reuben retorted in the same spirit, war would have been the result. While it is important on the one hand that laxness in dealing with sin be avoided, it is equally important on the other to shun harsh judgment and groundless suspicion.

While very sensitive to the least blame in regard to their own course, many are too severe in dealing with those whom they suppose to be in error. No one was ever reclaimed from a wrong position by

censure and reproach; but many are thus driven further from the right path and led to harden their hearts against conviction. A spirit of kindness, a courteous, forbearing deportment may save the erring and hide a multitude of sins.

The wisdom displayed by the Reubenites and their companions is worthy of imitation. While honestly seeking to promote the cause of true religion, they were misjudged and severely censured; yet they manifested no resentment. They listened with courtesy and patience to the charges of their brethren before attempting to make their defense, and then fully explained their motives and showed their innocence. Thus the difficulty which had threatened such serious consequences was amicably settled.

Even under false accusation those who are in the right can afford to be calm and considerate. God is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by men, and we can safely leave our case in His hands. He will as surely vindicate the cause of those who put their trust in Him as He searched out the guilt of Achan. Those who are actuated by the spirit of Christ will possess that charity which suffers long and is kind.

It is the will of God that union and brotherly love should exist among His people. The prayer of Christ just before His crucifixion was that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father, that the world might believe that God had sent Him. This most touching and wonderful prayer reaches down the ages, even to our day; for His words were, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word." John 17:20. While we are not to sacrifice one principle of truth, it should be our constant aim to reach this state of unity. This is the evidence of our discipleship. Said Jesus, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35. The apostle Peter exhorts the church, "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." 1 Peter 3:8, 9.



chapter 49

The Last Words of Joshua

THE wars and conquest ended, Joshua had withdrawn to the peaceful retirement of his home at Timnath-serah. "And it came to pass, a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua . . . called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers."

Some years had passed since the people had settled in their possessions, and already could be seen cropping out the same evils that had heretofore brought judgments upon Israel. As Joshua felt the infirmities of age stealing upon him, and realized that his work must soon close, he was filled with anxiety for the future of his people. It was with more than a father's interest that he addressed them, as they gathered once more about their aged chief. "Ye have seen," he said, "all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you." Although the Canaanites had been subdued, they still possessed a considerable portion of the land promised to Israel, and Joshua exhorted his people not to settle down at ease and forget the Lord's command to utterly dispossess these idolatrous nations.

The people in general were slow to complete the work of driving out the heathen. The tribes had dispersed to their possessions, the

This chapter is based on Joshua 23 and 24.

Joshua directed the men to set up a stone monument as a witness to the people's pledge to serve God.

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army had disbanded, and it was looked upon as a difficult and doubtful undertaking to renew the war. But Joshua declared: "The Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left."

Joshua appealed to the people themselves as witnesses that, so far as they had complied with the conditions, God had faithfully fulfilled His promises to them. "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls," he said, "that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." He declared to them that as the Lord had fulfilled His promises, so He would fulfill His threatenings. "It shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things. . . . When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord, . . . then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which He hath given unto you."

Satan deceives many with the plausible theory that God's love for His people is so great that He will excuse sin in them; he represents that while the threatenings of God's Word are to serve a certain purpose in His moral government, they are never to be literally fulfilled. But in all His dealings with His creatures God has maintained the principles of righteousness by revealing sin in its true character—by demonstrating that its sure result is misery and death. The unconditional pardon of sin never has been, and never will be. Such pardon would show the abandonment of the principles of righteousness, which are the very foundation of the government of God. It would fill the unfallen universe with consternation. God has faithfully pointed out the results of sin, and if these warnings were not true, how could we be sure that His promises would be fulfilled? That so-called benevolence which would set aside justice is not benevolence but weakness.

God is the life-giver. From the beginning all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable. It is only because the Redeemer has borne the curse of sin in our behalf that man can hope to escape, in his own person, its dire results.

Before the death of Joshua the heads and representatives of the tribes, obedient to his summons, again assembled at Shechem. No spot in all the land possessed so many sacred associations, carrying their minds back to God's covenant with Abraham and Jacob, and recalling also their own solemn vows upon their entrance into Canaan. Here were the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, the silent witnesses of those vows which now, in the presence of their dying leader, they had assembled to renew. On every side were evidences of what God had wrought for them; how He had given them a land for which they did not labor, and cities which they built not, vineyards and oliveyards which they planted not. Joshua reviewed once more the history of Israel, recounting the wonderful works of God, that all might have a sense of His love and mercy and might serve Him "in sincerity and in truth."

By Joshua's direction the ark had been brought from Shiloh. The occasion was one of great solemnity, and this symbol of God's presence would deepen the impression he wished to make upon the people. After presenting the goodness of God toward Israel, he called upon them, in the name of Jehovah, to choose whom they would serve. The worship of idols was still to some extent secretly practiced, and Joshua endeavored now to bring them to a decision that should banish this sin from Israel. "If it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah," he said, "choose you this day whom ye will serve." Joshua desired to lead them to serve God, not by compulsion, but willingly. Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in His service merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment would avail nothing. Open apostasy would not be more offensive to God than hypocrisy and mere formal worship.

The aged leader urged the people to consider, in all its bearings, what he had set before them, and to decide if they really desired to live as did the degraded idolatrous nations around them. If it seemed evil to them to serve Jehovah, the source of power, the fountain of blessing, let them that day choose whom they would serve—"the gods which your fathers served," from whom Abraham was called out, "or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell." These last words were a keen rebuke to Israel. The gods of the Amorites had not been able to protect their worshipers. Because of their abominable and debasing sins, that wicked nation had been destroyed, and the good land which they once possessed had been given to God's people. What folly for Israel to choose the deities for whose worship the Amorites had been destroyed! "As for me and my house," said Joshua, "we will serve Jehovah." The same holy zeal that inspired the leader's heart was communicated to the people. His appeals called forth the unhesitating response, "God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah, to serve other gods."

"Ye cannot serve the Lord," said Joshua: "for He is a holy God; . . . He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." Before there could be any permanent reformation the people must be led to feel their utter inability in themselves to render obedience to God. They had broken His law, it condemned them as transgressors, and it provided no way of escape. While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God's perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin and receive strength to obey God's law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Saviour, if they would be accepted of God.

Joshua endeavored to lead his hearers to weigh well their words, and refrain from vows which they would be unprepared to fulfill. With deep earnestness they repeated the declaration: "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." Solemnly consenting to the witness against them-

selves that they had chosen Jehovah, they once more reiterated their pledge of loyalty: "The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.

"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem." Having written an account of this solemn transaction, he placed it, with the book of the law, in the side of the ark. And he set up a pillar as a memorial, saying, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us; it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance."

Joshua's work for Israel was done. He had "wholly followed the Lord;" and in the book of God he is written, "The servant of Jehovah." The noblest testimony to his character as a public leader is the history of the generation that had enjoyed his labors: "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua."

Tithes and Offerings

IN THE Hebrew economy one tenth of the income of the people was set apart to support the public worship of God. Thus Moses declared to Israel: "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, . . . the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." Leviticus 27:30, 32.

But the tithing system did not originate with the Hebrews. From the earliest times the Lord claimed a tithe as His, and this claim was recognized and honored. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God. Genesis 14:20. Jacob, when at Bethel, an exile and a wanderer, promised the Lord, "Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." Genesis 28:22. As the Israelites were about to be established as a nation, the law of tithing was reaffirmed as one of the divinely ordained statutes upon obedience to which their prosperity depended.

The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures, and that to Him man's gratitude is due for the good gifts of His providence.

"He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Acts 17:25.

The Lord declares, "Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." Psalm 50:10. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine." Haggai 2:8. And it is God who gives men power to get wealth. Deuteronomy 8:18. As an acknowledgment that all things came from Him, the Lord directed that a portion of His bounty should be returned to Him in gifts and offerings to sustain His worship.

"The tithe . . . is the Lord's." Here the same form of expression is employed as in the law of the Sabbath. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Exodus 20:10. God reserved to Himself a specified portion of man's time and of his means, and no man could, without guilt, appropriate either for his own interests.

The tithe was to be exclusively devoted to the use of the Levites, the tribe that had been set apart for the service of the sanctuary. But this was by no means the limit of the contributions for religious purposes. The tabernacle, as afterward the temple, was erected wholly by freewill offerings; and to provide for necessary repairs and other expenses, Moses directed that as often as the people were numbered, each should contribute a half shekel for "the service of the tabernacle." In the time of Nehemiah a contribution was made yearly for this purpose. See Exodus 30:12-16; 2 Kings 12:4, 5; 2 Chronicles 24:4-13; Nehemiah 10:32, 33. From time to time sin offerings and thank offerings were brought to God. These were presented in great numbers at the annual feasts. And the most liberal provision was made for the poor.

Even before the tithe could be reserved there had been an acknowledgement of the claims of God. The first that ripened of every product of the land was consecrated to Him. The first of the wool when the sheep were shorn, of the grain when the wheat was threshed, the first of the oil and the wine, was set apart for God. So also were the first-born of all animals; and a redemption price was paid for the first-born son. The first fruits were to be presented before the Lord at the sanctuary, and were then devoted to the use of the priests.

Thus the people were constantly reminded that God was the true proprietor of their fields, their flocks, and their herds; that He sent

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them sunshine and rain for their seedtime and harvest, and that everything they possessed was of His creation, and He had made them stewards of His goods.

As the men of Israel, laden with the first fruits of field and orchard and vineyard, gathered at the tabernacle, there was made a public acknowledgment of God's goodness. When the priest accepted the gift, the offerer, speaking as in the presence of Jehovah, said, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father;" and he described the sojourn in Egypt and the affliction from which God had delivered Israel "with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders." And he said, "He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which Thou, Jehovah, hast given me." Deuteronomy 26:5, 8-11.

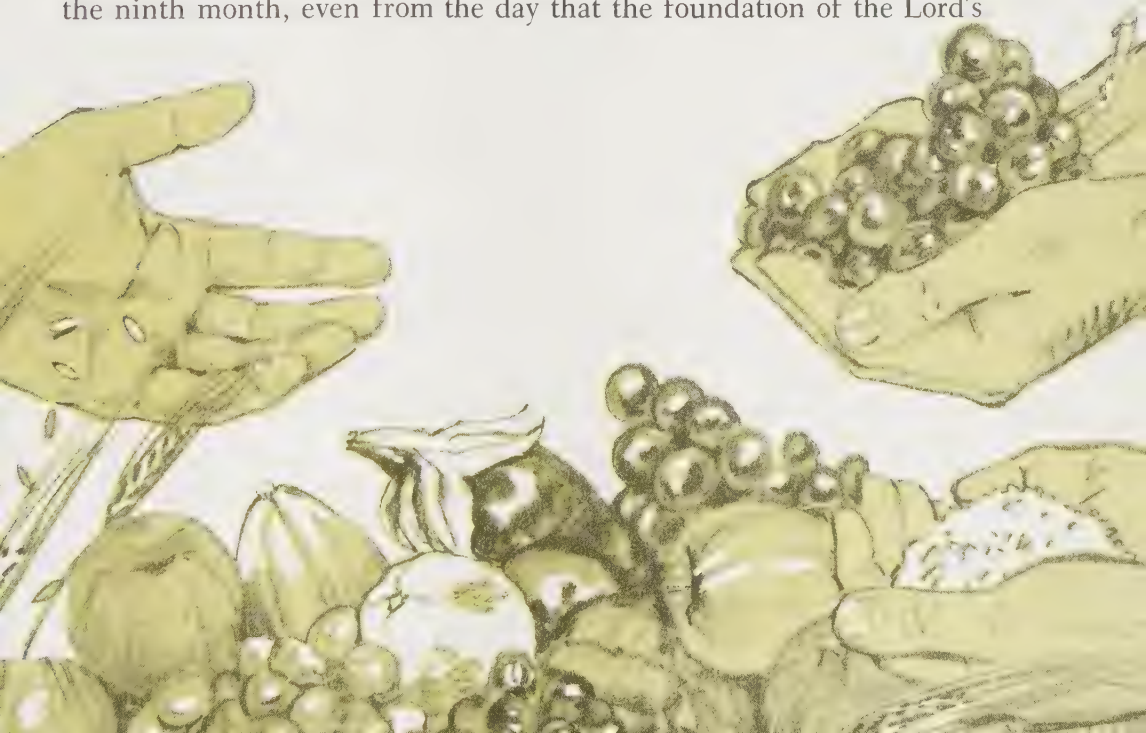
The contributions required of the Hebrews for religious and charitable purposes amounted to fully one fourth of their income. So heavy a tax upon the resources of the people might be expected to reduce them to poverty; but, on the contrary, the faithful observance of these regulations was one of the conditions of their prosperity. On condition of their obedience God made them this promise: "I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field. . . . And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 3:11.

A striking illustration of the results of selfishly withholding even freewill offerings from the cause of God was given in the days of the prophet Haggai. After their return from the captivity in Babylon, the Jews undertook to rebuild the temple of the Lord; but meeting determined opposition from their enemies, they discontinued the work; and a severe drought, by which they were reduced to actual want, convinced them that it was impossible to complete the building of the temple. "The time is not come," they said, "the time that the Lord's house should be built." But a message was sent them by the Lord's prophet: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and

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this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Haggai 1:2-6. And then the reason is given: "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." Verses 9-12. "When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands." Haggai 2:16, 19.

Roused by these warnings, the people set themselves to build the house of God. Then the word of the Lord came to them: "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's



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temple was laid, . . . from this day will I bless you." Verses 18, 19.

Says the wise man, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." Proverbs 11:24. And the same lesson is taught in the New Testament by the apostle Paul: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:6, 8.

God intended that His people Israel should be light bearers to all the inhabitants of the earth. In maintaining His public worship they were bearing a testimony to the existence and sovereignty of the living God. And this worship it was their privilege to sustain, as an expression of their loyalty and their love to Him. The Lord has ordained that the diffusion of light and truth in the earth shall be dependent upon the efforts and offerings of those who are partakers of the heavenly gift. He might have made angels the ambassadors of His truth; He might have made known His will, as He proclaimed the law from Sinai, with His own voice; but in His infinite love and wisdom He called men to become colaborers with Himself, by choosing them to do this work.

In the days of Israel the tithe and freewill offerings were needed to maintain the ordinances of divine service. Should the people of God give less in this age? The principle laid down by Christ is that our offerings to God should be in proportion to the light and privileges enjoyed. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Luke 12:48. Said the Saviour to His disciples as He sent them forth, "Freely ye have received, freely give." Matthew 10:8. As our blessings and privileges are increased—above all, as we have before us the unparalleled sacrifice of the glorious Son of God—should not our gratitude find expression in more abundant gifts to extend to others the message of salvation? The work of the gospel, as it widens, requires greater provision to sustain it than was called for anciently; and this makes the law of tithes and offerings of even more urgent

necessity now than under the Hebrew economy. If His people were liberally to sustain His cause by their voluntary gifts, instead of resorting to unchristian and unhallowed methods to fill the treasury, God would be honored, and many more souls would be won to Christ.

The plan of Moses to raise means for the building of the tabernacle was highly successful. No urging was necessary. Nor did he employ any of the devices to which churches in our day so often resort. He made no grand feast. He did not invite the people to scenes of gaiety, dancing, and general amusement; neither did he institute lotteries, nor anything of this profane order, to obtain means to erect the tabernacle for God. The Lord directed Moses to invite the children of Israel to bring their offerings. He was to accept gifts from everyone that gave willingly, from his heart. And the offerings came in so great abundance that Moses bade the people cease bringing, for they had supplied more than could be used.

God has made men His stewards. The property which He has placed in their hands is the means that He has provided for the spread of the gospel. To those who prove themselves faithful stewards He will commit greater trusts. Saith the Lord, "Them that honor Me I will honor." 1 Samuel 2:30. "God loveth a cheerful giver," and when His people, with grateful hearts, bring their gifts and offerings to Him, "not grudgingly, or of necessity," His blessing will attend them, as He has promised. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Malachi 3:10.



chapter 51

God's Care for the Poor

TO PROMOTE the assembling of the people for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, a second tithe of all the increase was required. Concerning the first tithe, the Lord had declared, "I have given the children of Levi *all the tenth* in Israel." Numbers 18:21. But in regard to the second He commanded, "Thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always." Deuteronomy 14:23, 29; 16:11-14. This tithe, or its equivalent in money, they were for two years to bring to the place where the sanctuary was established. After presenting a thank offering to God, and a specified portion to the priest, the offerers were to use the remainder for a religious feast, in which the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow should participate. Thus provision was made for the thank offerings and feasts at the yearly festivals, and the people were drawn to the society of the priests and Levites, that they might receive instruction and encouragement in the service of God.

Every third year, however, this second tithe was to be used at

At the yearly festivals a second tithe was used partly for a sacred feast in which the poor shared.

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home, in entertaining the Levite and the poor, as Moses said, "That they may eat within thy gates, and be filled." Deuteronomy 26:12. This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality.

And further provision was made for the poor. There is nothing, after their recognition of the claims of God, that more distinguishes the laws given by Moses than the liberal, tender, and hospitable spirit enjoined toward the poor. Although God had promised greatly to bless His people, it was not His design that poverty should be wholly unknown among them. He declared that the poor should never cease out of the land. There would ever be those among His people who would call into exercise their sympathy, tenderness, and benevolence. Then, as now, persons were subject to misfortune, sickness, and loss of property; yet so long as they followed the instruction given by God, there were no beggars among them, neither any who suffered for food.

The law of God gave the poor a right to a certain portion of the produce of the soil. When hungry, a man was at liberty to go to his neighbor's field or orchard or vineyard, and eat of the grain or fruit to satisfy his hunger. It was in accordance with this permission that the disciples of Jesus plucked and ate of the standing grain as they passed through a field upon the Sabbath day.

All the gleanings of harvest field, orchard, and vineyard, belonged to the poor. "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field," said Moses, "and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it. . . . When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again. . . . When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt." Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Leviticus 19:9, 10.

Every seventh year special provision was made for the poor. The sabbatical year, as it was called, began at the end of the harvest. At the seedtime, which followed the ingathering, the people were not to

sow; they should not dress the vineyard in the spring; and they must expect neither harvest nor vintage. Of that which the land produced spontaneously they might eat while fresh, but they were not to lay up any portion of it in their storehouses. The yield of this year was to be free for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and even for the creatures of the field. Exodus 23:10, 11; Leviticus 25:5.

But if the land ordinarily produced only enough to supply the wants of the people, how were they to subsist during the year when no crops were gathered? For this the promise of God made ample provision. "I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year," He said, "and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store." Leviticus 25:21, 22.

The observance of the sabbatical year was to be a benefit to both the land and the people. The soil, lying untilled for one season, would afterward produce more plentifully. The people were released from the pressing labors of the field; and while there were various branches of work that could be followed during this time, all enjoyed greater leisure, which afforded opportunity for the restoration of their physical powers for the exertions of the following years. They had more time for meditation and prayer, for acquainting themselves with the teachings and requirements of the Lord, and for the instruction of their households.

In the sabbatical year the Hebrew slaves were to be set at liberty, and they were not to be sent away portionless. The Lord's direction was: "When thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him." Deuteronomy 15:13, 14.

The hire of a laborer was to be promptly paid: "Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land: . . . at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for

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he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it." Deuteronomy 24:14, 15.

Special directions were also given concerning the treatment of fugitives from service: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him." Deuteronomy 23:15, 16.

To the poor, the seventh year was a year of release from debt. The Hebrews were enjoined at all times to assist their needy brethren by lending them money without interest. To take usury from a poor man was expressly forbidden: "If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase." Leviticus 25:35-37. If the debt remained unpaid until the year of release, the principal itself could not be recovered. The people were expressly warned against withholding from their brethren needed assistance on account of this: "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, . . . thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. . . . Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee." "The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land," "and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth." Deuteronomy 15:7-9, 11, 8.

None need fear that their liberality would bring them to want. Obedience to God's commandments would surely result in prosperity. "Thou shalt lend unto many nations," He said, "but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee." Deuteronomy 15:6.

After "seven sabbaths of years," "seven times seven years," came that great year of release—the jubilee. "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound . . . throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." Leviticus 25:9, 10.

"On the tenth day of the seventh month, in the Day of Atonement," the trumpet of the jubilee was sounded. Throughout the land, wherever the Jewish people dwelt, the sound was heard, calling upon all the children of Jacob to welcome the year of release. On the great Day of Atonement satisfaction was made for the sins of Israel, and with gladness of heart the people would welcome the jubilee.

As in the sabbatical year, the land was not to be sown or reaped, and all that it produced was to be regarded as the rightful property of the poor. Certain classes of Hebrew slaves—all who did not receive their liberty in the sabbatical year—were now set free. But that which especially distinguished the year of jubilee was the reversion of all landed property to the family of the original possessor. By the special direction of God the land had been divided by lot. After the division was made no one was at liberty to trade his estate. Neither was he to sell his land unless poverty compelled him to do so, and then, whenever he or any of his kindred might desire to redeem it, the purchaser must not refuse to sell it; and if unredeemed, it would revert to its first possessor or his heirs in the year of jubilee.

The Lord declared to Israel: "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." Leviticus 25:23. The people were to be impressed with the fact that it was God's land which they were permitted to possess for a time; that He was the rightful owner, the original proprietor, and that He would have special consideration made for the poor and unfortunate. It was to be impressed upon the minds of all that the poor have as much right to a place in God's world as have the more wealthy.

Such were the provisions made by our merciful Creator, to lessen

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suffering, to bring some ray of hope, to flash some gleam of sunshine, into the life of the destitute and distressed.

The Lord would place a check upon the inordinate love of property and power. Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully as worthy in God's sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren. The sense of this oppression would arouse the passions of the poorer class. There would be a feeling of despair and desperation which would tend to demoralize society and open the door to crimes of every description. The regulations that God established were designed to promote social equality. The provisions of the sabbatical year and the jubilee would, in a great measure, set right that which during the interval had gone wrong in the social and political economy of the nation.

These regulations were designed to bless the rich no less than the poor. They would restrain avarice and a disposition for self-exaltation, and would cultivate a noble spirit of benevolence; and by fostering good will and confidence between all classes, they would promote social order, the stability of government. We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect in blessing upon ourselves. The law of mutual dependence runs through all classes of society. The poor are not more dependent upon the rich than are the rich upon the poor. While the one class ask a share in the blessings which God has bestowed upon their wealthier neighbors, the other need the faithful service, the strength of brain and bone and muscle, that are the capital of the poor.

Great blessings were promised to Israel on condition of obedience to the Lord's directions. "I will give you rain in due season," He declared, "and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat

your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. . . . I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people. . . . But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and . . . ye break My covenant: . . . ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you." Leviticus 26:4-17.

There are many who urge with great enthusiasm that all men should have an equal share in the temporal blessings of God. But this was not the purpose of the Creator. A diversity of condition is one of the means by which God designs to prove and develop character. Yet He intends that those who have worldly possessions shall regard themselves merely as stewards of His goods, as entrusted with means to be employed for the benefit of the suffering and the needy.

Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us, and He unites His interest with that of His suffering people. The heart of our Redeemer sympathizes with the poorest and lowliest of His earthly children. He tells us that they are His representatives on earth. He has placed them among us to awaken in our hearts the love that He feels toward the suffering and oppressed. Pity and benevolence shown to them are accepted by Christ as if shown to Himself. An act of cruelty or neglect toward them is regarded as though done to Him.

If the law given by God for the benefit of the poor had continued to be carried out, how different would be the present condition of the world, morally, spiritually, and temporally! Selfishness and self-importance would not be manifested as now, but each would cherish a kind regard for the happiness and welfare of others; and such widespread destitution as is now seen in many lands would not exist.

The principles which God has enjoined, would prevent the terrible evils that in all ages have resulted from the oppression of the rich

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toward the poor and the suspicion and hatred of the poor toward the rich. While they might hinder the amassing of great wealth and the indulgence of unbounded luxury, they would prevent the consequent ignorance and degradation of tens of thousands whose ill-paid servitude is required to build up these colossal fortunes. They would bring a peaceful solution of those problems that now threaten to fill the world with anarchy and bloodshed.

chapter 52

The Annual Feasts

THERE were three annual assemblies of all Israel for worship at the sanctuary. Exodus 23: 14-16. Shiloh was for a time the place of these gatherings; but Jerusalem afterward became the center of the nation's worship, and here the tribes convened for the solemn feasts.

The people were surrounded by fierce, warlike tribes, that were eager to seize upon their lands; yet three times every year all the able-bodied men and all the people who could make the journey were directed to leave their homes and repair to the place of assembly, near the center of the land. What was to hinder their enemies from sweeping down upon those unprotected households, to lay them waste with fire and sword? What was to prevent an invasion of the land, that would bring Israel into captivity to some foreign foe? God had promised to be the protector of His people. "The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Psalm 34:7. While the Israelites went up to worship, divine power would place a restraint upon their enemies. God's promise was, "I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year." Exodus 34:24.

This chapter is based on Leviticus 23.

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The first of these festivals, the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, occurred in Abib, the first month of the Jewish year, corresponding to the last of March and the beginning of April. The cold of winter was past, the latter rain had ended, and all nature rejoiced in the freshness and beauty of the springtime. The grass was green on the hills and valleys, and wild flowers everywhere brightened the fields. The moon, now approaching the full, made the evenings delightful. It was the season so beautifully pictured by the sacred singer:

"The winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig tree ripeneth her green figs,
And the vines are in blossom,
They give forth their fragrance."

Song of Solomon 2:11-13, R.V.

Throughout the land bands of pilgrims were making their way toward Jerusalem. The shepherds from their flocks, the herdsmen from the mountains, fishers from the Sea of Galilee, the husbandmen from their fields, and sons of the prophets from the sacred schools—all turned their steps toward the place where God's presence was revealed. They journeyed by short stages, for many went on foot. The caravans were constantly receiving accessions, and often became very large before reaching the Holy City.

Nature's gladness awakened joy in the hearts of Israel and gratitude to the Giver of all good. The grand Hebrew psalms were chanted, exalting the glory and majesty of Jehovah. At the sound of the signal trumpet, with the music of cymbals, the chorus of thanksgiving arose, swelled by hundreds of voices:

"I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go unto the house of the Lord.
Our feet are standing
Within thy gates, O Jerusalem. . . .
Whither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, . . .

To give thanks unto the name of Jehovah. . . .
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee."

Psalm 122:1-6, R.V.

As they saw around them the hills where the heathen had been wont to kindle their altar fires, the children of Israel sang:

"Shall I lift up mine eyes to the hills?
Whence should my help come?
My help cometh from Jehovah,
Which made heaven and earth."

Psalm 121:1, 2 (margin).

"They that trust in the Lord
Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth forever.
As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the Lord is round about His people,
From this time forth and forevermore."

Psalm 125:1, 2, R.V.

Surmounting the hills in view of the Holy City, they looked with reverent awe upon the throngs of worshipers wending their way to the temple. They saw the smoke of the incense ascending, and as they heard the trumpets of the Levites heralding the sacred service, they caught the inspiration of the hour, and sang:

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.
Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King."

Psalm 48:1, 2.

"Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces."
"Open to me the gates of righteousness:
I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord."
"I will pay my vows unto the Lord
Now in the presence of all His people,
In the courts of the Lord's house,
In the midst of thee, O Jerusalem,
Praise ye the Lord."

Psalm 122:7; 118:19; 116:18, 19.



All the houses in Jerusalem were thrown open to the pilgrims, and rooms were furnished free; but this was not sufficient for the vast assembly, and tents were pitched in every available space in the city and upon the surrounding hills.

On the fourteenth day of the month, at even, the Passover was celebrated, its solemn, impressive ceremonies commemorating the deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and pointing forward to the sacrifice that should deliver from the bondage of sin. When the Saviour yielded up His life on Calvary, the significance of the Passover ceased, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted as a memorial of the same event of which the Passover had been a type.

The Passover was followed by the seven days' feast of unleavened bread. The first and the seventh day were days of holy convocation, when no servile work was to be performed. On the second day of the feast, the first fruits of the year's harvest were presented before God. Barley was the earliest grain in Palestine, and at the opening of the feast it was beginning to ripen. A sheaf of this grain was waved by the priest before the altar of God, as an acknowledgment that all was His. Not until this ceremony had been performed was the harvest to be gathered.

Fifty days from the offering of first fruits, came the Pentecost, called also the feast of harvest and the feast of weeks. As an expression of gratitude for the grain prepared as food, two loaves baked with leaven were presented before God. The Pentecost occupied but one day, which was devoted to religious service.

In the seventh month came the Feast of Tabernacles, or of ingathering. This feast acknowledged God's bounty in the products of the orchard, the olive grove, and the vineyard. It was the crowning festal gathering of the year. The land had yielded its increase, the harvests had been gathered into the granaries, the fruits, the oil, and the wine had been stored, the first fruits had been reserved, and now the people came with their tributes of thanksgiving to God, who had thus richly blessed them.

This feast was to be pre-eminently an occasion of rejoicing. It oc-

Throughout the land pilgrim bands,
some large, some small, made their
way to Jerusalem for the Passover.

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curred just after the great Day of Atonement, when the assurance had been given that their iniquity should be remembered no more. At peace with God, they now came before Him to acknowledge His goodness and to praise Him for His mercy. The labors of the harvest being ended, and the toils of the new year not yet begun, the people were free from care, and could give themselves up to the sacred, joyous influences of the hour. Though only the fathers and sons were commanded to appear at the feasts, yet, so far as possible, all the household were to attend them, and to their hospitality the servants, the Levites, the stranger, and the poor were made welcome.

Like the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles was commemorative. In memory of their pilgrim life in the wilderness the people were now to leave their houses and dwell in booths, or arbors, formed from the green branches “of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook.” Leviticus 23:40, 42, 43.

The first day was a holy convocation, and to the seven days of the feast an eighth day was added, which was observed in like manner.

At these yearly assemblies the hearts of old and young would be encouraged in the service of God, while the association of the people from the different quarters of the land would strengthen the ties that bound them to God and to one another. Well would it be for the people of God at the present time to have a Feast of Tabernacles—a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to them. As the children of Israel celebrated the deliverance that God had wrought for their fathers, and His miraculous preservation of them during their journeyings from Egypt, so should we gratefully call to mind the various ways He has devised for bringing us out from the world, and from the darkness of error, into the precious light of His grace and truth.

With those who lived at a distance from the tabernacle, more than a month of every year must have been occupied in attendance upon the annual feasts. This example of devotion to God should emphasize the importance of religious worship and the necessity of subordinating our selfish, worldly interests to those that are spiritual and eternal.

We sustain a loss when we neglect the privilege of associating together to strengthen and encourage one another in the service of God. The truths of His Word lose their vividness and importance in our minds. Our hearts cease to be enlightened and aroused by the sanctifying influence, and we decline in spirituality. In our intercourse as Christians we lose much by lack of sympathy with one another. He who shuts himself up to himself is not filling the position that God designed he should. We are all children of one Father, dependent upon one another for happiness. The claims of God and of humanity are upon us. It is the proper cultivation of the social elements of our nature that brings us into sympathy with our brethren and affords us happiness in our efforts to bless others.

The Feast of Tabernacles was not only commemorative but typical. It not only pointed back to the wilderness sojourn, but, as the feast of harvest, it celebrated the ingathering of the fruits of the earth, and pointed forward to the great day of final ingathering, when the Lord of the harvest shall send forth His reapers to gather the tares together in bundles for the fire, and to gather the wheat into His garner. At that time the wicked will all be destroyed. They will become "as though they had not been." Obadiah 16. And every voice in the whole universe will unite in joyful praise to God. Says the revelator, "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Revelation 5:13.

The people of Israel praised God at the Feast of Tabernacles, as they called to mind His mercy in their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and His tender care for them during their pilgrim life in the wilderness. They rejoiced also in the consciousness of pardon and acceptance, through the service of the day of atonement, just ended. But when the ransomed of the Lord shall have been safely gathered into the heavenly Canaan, forever delivered from the bondage of the curse, under which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain to-

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gether until now" (Romans 8:22), they will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Christ's great work of atonement for men will then have been completed, and their sins will have been forever blotted out.

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them;
And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.
It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing:
The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it,
The excellency of Carmel and Sharon;
They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then shall the lame man leap as an hart,
And the tongue of the dumb sing:

"For in the wilderness shall waters break out,
And streams in the desert.
And the parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water: . . .

"And an highway shall be there, and a way,
And it shall be called The way of holiness;
The unclean shall not pass over it;
But it shall be for those:
The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

"No lion shall be there,
Nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon,
It shall not be found there;
But the redeemed shall walk there:

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with songs
And everlasting joy upon their heads:
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Isaiah 35:1, 2, 5-10.

The Earlier Judges

AFTER the settlement in Canaan the tribes made no vigorous effort to complete the conquest of the land. Satisfied with the territory already gained, their zeal soon flagged, and the war was discontinued. "When Israel was strong, . . . they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out." Judges 1:28.

The Lord had faithfully fulfilled, on His part, the promises made to Israel; Joshua had broken the power of the Canaanites, and had distributed the land to the tribes. It only remained for them, trusting in the assurance of divine aid, to complete the work of dispossessing the inhabitants of the land. But this they failed to do. By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God, and thus failed to fulfill the condition on which He had promised to place them in possession of Canaan.

From the very first communication of God with them at Sinai, they had been warned against idolatry. Immediately after the proclamation of the law the message was sent them by Moses concerning the nations of Canaan: "Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. And ye shall serve the Lord

This chapter is based on Judges 6 to 8; 10.

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your God, and He shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." Exodus 23:24, 25. The assurance was given that so long as they remained obedient, God would subdue their enemies before them: "I will send My fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come; and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. . . . I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against Me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee." Exodus 23:27-33. These directions were reiterated in the most solemn manner by Moses before his death, and they were repeated by Joshua.

God had placed His people in Canaan as a mighty breastwork to stay the tide of moral evil, that it might not flood the world. If faithful to Him, God intended that Israel should go on conquering and to conquer. He would give into their hands nations greater and more powerful than the Canaanites. The promise was: "If ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, . . . then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as He hath said unto you." Deuteronomy 11:22-25.

But regardless of their high destiny, they chose the course of ease and self-indulgence; they let slip their opportunities for completing

the conquest of the land; and for many generations they were afflicted by the remnant of these idolatrous peoples, that were, as the prophet had foretold, as "pricks" in their eyes, and as "thorns" in their sides. Numbers 33:55.

The Israelites were "mingled among the heathen, and learned their works." Psalm 106:35. They intermarried with the Canaanites, and idolatry spread like a plague throughout the land. "They served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils: . . . and the land was polluted with blood. . . . Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance." Psalm 106:36-40.

Until the generation that had received instruction from Joshua became extinct, idolatry made little headway; but the parents had prepared the way for the apostasy of their children. The disregard of the Lord's restrictions on the part of those who came in possession of Canaan sowed seeds of evil that continued to bring forth bitter fruit for many generations. The simple habits of the Hebrews had secured them physical health; but association with the heathen led to the indulgence of appetite and passion, which gradually lessened physical strength and enfeebled the mental and moral powers. By their sins the Israelites were separated from God; His strength was removed from them, and they could no longer prevail against their enemies. Thus they were brought into subjection to the very nations that through God they might have subdued.

"They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt," "and guided them in the wilderness like a flock." "They provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images." Therefore the Lord "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among them; and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand." Judges 2:12; Psalm 78:52, 58, 60, 61. Yet He did not utterly forsake His people. There was ever a remnant who were true to Jehovah; and from time to time the Lord raised up faithful

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and valiant men to put down idolatry and to deliver the Israelites from their enemies. But when the deliverer was dead, and the people were released from his authority, they would gradually return to their idols. And thus the story of backsliding and chastisement, of confession and deliverance, was repeated again and again.

The king of Mesopotamia, the king of Moab, and after them the Philistines, and the Canaanites of Hazor, led by Sisera, in turn became the oppressors of Israel. Othniel, Shamgar, and Ehud, Deborah and Barak, were raised up as deliverers of their people. But again "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian." Heretofore the hand of the oppressor had fallen but lightly on the tribes dwelling east of the Jordan, but in the present calamities they were the first sufferers.

The Amalekites on the south of Canaan, as well as the Midianites on its eastern border, and in the deserts beyond, were still the unrelenting enemies of Israel. The latter nation had been nearly destroyed by the Israelites in the days of Moses, but they had since increased greatly, and had become numerous and powerful. They had thirsted for revenge; and now that the protecting hand of God was withdrawn from Israel, the opportunity had come. Not alone the tribes east of Jordan, but the whole land suffered from their ravages. The wild, fierce inhabitants of the desert, "as locusts for multitude"



(Judges 6:5, R.V.), came swarming into the land, with their flocks and herds. Like a devouring plague they spread over the country, from the river Jordan to the Philistine plain. They came as soon as the harvests began to ripen, and remained until the last fruits of the earth had been gathered. They stripped the fields of their increase and robbed and maltreated the inhabitants and then returned to the deserts. Thus the Israelites dwelling in the open country were forced to abandon their homes, and to congregate in walled towns, to seek refuge in fortresses, or even to find shelter in caves and rocky fastnesses among the mountains. For seven years this oppression continued, and then, as the people in their distress gave heed to the Lord's reproof, and confessed their sins, God again raised up a helper for them.

Gideon was the son of Joash, of the tribe of Manasseh. The division to which this family belonged held no leading position, but the household of Joash was distinguished for courage and integrity. Of his brave sons it is said, "Each one resembled the children of a king." All but one had fallen in the struggles against the Midianites, and he had caused his name to be feared by the invaders. To Gideon came the divine call to deliver his people. He was engaged at the time in threshing wheat. A small quantity of grain had been concealed, and not daring to beat it out on the ordinary threshing floor, he had resorted to a spot near the winepress; for the season of ripe grapes being still far off, little notice was now taken of the vineyards. As Gideon labored in secrecy and silence, he sadly pondered upon the condition of Israel and considered how the oppressor's yoke might be broken from off his people.

Suddenly the "Angel of the Lord" appeared and addressed him with the words, "Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valor."

"O my Lord," was his answer, "if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

The Messenger of heaven replied, "Go in this thy might, and thou

shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

Gideon desired some token that the one now addressing him was the Covenant Angel, who in time past had wrought for Israel. Angels of God, who communed with Abraham, had once tarried to share his hospitality; and Gideon now entreated the divine Messenger to remain as his guest. Hastening to his tent, he prepared from his scanty store a kid and unleavened cakes, which he brought forth and set before Him. But the Angel bade him, "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth." Gideon did so, and then the sign which he had desired was given: with the staff in His hand, the Angel touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and a flame bursting from the rock consumed the sacrifice. Then the Angel vanished from his sight.

Gideon's father, Joash, who shared in the apostasy of his countrymen, had erected at Ophrah, where he dwelt, a large altar to Baal, at which the people of the town worshiped. Gideon was commanded to destroy this altar and to erect an altar to Jehovah over the rock on which the offering had been consumed, and there to present a sacrifice to the Lord. The offering of sacrifice to God had been committed to the priests, and had been restricted to the altar at Shiloh; but He who had established the ritual service, and to whom all its offerings pointed, had power to change its requirements. The deliverance of Israel was to be preceded by a solemn protest against the worship of Baal. Gideon must declare war upon idolatry before going out to battle with the enemies of his people.

The divine direction was faithfully carried out. Knowing that he would be opposed if it were attempted openly, Gideon performed the work in secret; with the aid of his servants, accomplishing the whole in one night. Great was the rage of the men of Ophrah when they came next morning to pay their devotions to Baal. They would have taken Gideon's life had not Joash—who had been told of the Angel's visit—stood in defense of his son. "Will ye plead for Baal?" said Joash. "Will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death

whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar." If Baal could not defend his own altar, how could he be trusted to protect his worshipers?

All thoughts of violence toward Gideon were dismissed; and when he sounded the trumpet of war, the men of Ophrah were among the first to gather to his standard. Heralds were dispatched to his own tribe of Manasseh, and also to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphthali, and all answered to the call.

Gideon dared not place himself at the head of the army without still further evidence that God had called him to this work, and that He would be with him. He prayed, "If Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth besides, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said." In the morning the fleece was wet, while the ground was dry. But now a doubt arose, since wool naturally absorbs moisture when there is any in the air; the test might not be decisive. Hence he asked that the sign be reversed, pleading that his extreme caution might not displease the Lord. His request was granted.

Thus encouraged, Gideon led out his forces to give battle to the invaders. "All the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel." The entire force under Gideon's command numbered only thirty-two thousand men; but with the vast host of the enemy spread out before him, the word of the Lord came to him: "The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead." Those who were unwilling to face danger and hardships, or whose worldly interests would draw their hearts from the work of God, would add no strength to the armies of Israel. Their presence would prove only a cause of weakness.



It had been made a law in Israel that before they went to battle the following proclamation should be made throughout the army: "What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her." And the officers were to speak further to the people, saying, "What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." Deuteronomy 20: 5-8.

Because his numbers were so few compared with those of the enemy, Gideon had refrained from making the usual proclamation. He was filled with astonishment at the declaration that his army was too large. But the Lord saw the pride and unbelief existing in the hearts of His people. Aroused by the stirring appeals of Gideon, they had readily enlisted; but many were filled with fear when they saw the multitudes of the Midianites. Yet, had Israel triumphed, those very ones would have taken the glory to themselves instead of ascribing the victory to God.

Gideon obeyed the Lord's direction, and with a heavy heart he saw twenty-two thousand, or more than two thirds of his entire force, depart for their homes. Again the word of the Lord came to him: "The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go." The people were led down to the waterside, expecting to make an immediate advance upon the enemy. A few hastily took a little water in the hand and sucked it up as they went on; but nearly all bowed upon their knees, and leisurely drank from the surface of the stream. Those who took of the water in their hands were but three

The next day Gideon arose early and wrung a bowlful of water from the fleece. His prayer was answered.

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hundred out of ten thousand; yet these were selected; all the rest were permitted to return to their homes.

By the simplest means character is often tested. Those who in time of peril were intent upon supplying their own wants were not the men to be trusted in an emergency. The Lord has no place in His work for the indolent and self-indulgent. The men of His choice were the few who would not permit their own wants to delay them in the discharge of duty. The three hundred chosen men not only possessed courage and self-control, but they were men of faith. They had not defiled themselves with idolatry. God could direct them, and through them He could work deliverance for Israel. Success does not depend upon numbers. God can deliver by few as well as by many. He is honored not so much by the great numbers as by the character of those who serve Him.

The Israelites were stationed on the brow of a hill overlooking the valley where the hosts of the invaders lay encamped. "And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand which is upon the seashore for multitude." Judges 7:12, R.V. Gideon trembled as he thought of the conflict of the morrow. But the Lord spoke to him in the night season and bade him, with Phurah his attendant, go down to the camp of the Midianites, intimating that he would there hear something for his encouragement. He went, and, waiting in the darkness and silence, he heard a soldier relating a dream to his companion: "Lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along." The other answered in words that stirred the heart of that unseen listener, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." Gideon recognized the voice of God speaking to him through those Midianitish strangers. Returning to the few men under his command, he said, "Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."

By divine direction a plan of attack was suggested to him, which

he immediately set out to execute. The three hundred men were divided into three companies. To every man were given a trumpet, and a torch concealed in an earthen pitcher. The men were stationed in such a manner as to approach the Midianite camp from different directions. In the dead of night, at a signal from Gideon's war horn, the three companies sounded their trumpets; then, breaking their pitchers and displaying the blazing torches, they rushed upon the enemy with the terrible war cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!"

The sleeping army was suddenly aroused. Upon every side was seen the light of the flaming torches. In every direction was heard the sound of trumpets, with the cry of the assailants. Believing themselves at the mercy of an overwhelming force, the Midianites were panic-stricken. With wild cries of alarm they fled for life, and, mistaking their own companions for enemies, they slew one another. As news of the victory spread, thousands of the men of Israel who had been dismissed to their homes returned and joined in pursuit of their fleeing enemies. The Midianites were making their way toward the Jordan, hoping to reach their own territory, beyond the river. Gideon sent messengers to the tribe of Ephraim, rousing them to intercept the fugitives at the southern fords. Meanwhile, with his three hundred, "faint, yet pursuing," Gideon crossed the stream hard after those who had already gained the farther side. The two princes, Zebah and Zalmunna, who had been over the entire host, and who had escaped with an army of fifteen thousand men, were overtaken by Gideon, their force completely scattered, and the leaders captured and slain.

In this signal defeat not less than one hundred and twenty thousand of the invaders perished. The power of the Midianites was broken, so that they were never again able to make war upon Israel. The tidings spread swiftly far and wide, that Israel's God had again fought for His people. No words can describe the terror of the surrounding nations when they learned what simple means had prevailed against the power of a bold, warlike people.

The leader whom God chose to overthrow the Midianites occupied no prominent position in Israel. He was not a ruler, a priest, or a



Levite. He thought himself the least in his father's house. But God saw in him a man of courage and integrity. He was distrustful of himself and willing to follow the guidance of the Lord. God does not always choose for His work men of the greatest talents, but He selects those whom He can best use. "Before honor is humility." Proverbs 15:33. The Lord can work most effectually through those who are most sensible of their own insufficiency, and who will rely upon Him as their leader and source of strength. He will make them strong by uniting their weakness to His might, and wise by connecting their ignorance with His wisdom.

If they would cherish true humility, the Lord could do much more for His people; but there are few who can be trusted with any large measure of responsibility or success without becoming self-confident and forgetful of their dependence upon God. This is why, in choosing the instruments for His work, the Lord passes by those whom the world honors as great, talented, and brilliant. They are too often proud and self-sufficient. They feel competent to act without counsel from God.

The simple act of blowing a blast upon the trumpet by the army of Joshua around Jericho, and by Gideon's little band about the hosts of Midian, was made effectual, through the power of God, to overthrow the might of His enemies. The most complete system that men have ever devised, apart from the power and wisdom of God, will prove a failure, while the most unpromising methods will succeed when divinely appointed and entered upon with humility and faith. Trust in God and obedience to His will are as essential to the Christian in the spiritual warfare as to Gideon and Joshua in their battles with the Canaanites. By the repeated manifestations of His power in behalf of Israel, God would lead them to have faith in Him—with confidence to seek His help in every emergency. He is just as willing to work with the efforts of His people now and to accomplish great things through weak instrumentalities. All heaven awaits our demand upon its wisdom and strength. God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephesians 3:20.

Gideon returned from pursuing the enemies of the nation, to meet

The soldiers broke their pitchers to let the torches flare and terrorized their enemies with trumpet blasts.

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censure and accusation from his own countrymen. When at his call the men of Israel had rallied against the Midianites, the tribe of Ephraim had remained behind. They looked upon the effort as a perilous undertaking; and as Gideon sent them no special summons, they availed themselves of this excuse not to join their brethren. But when the news of Israel's triumph reached them, the Ephraimites were envious because they had not shared it. After the rout of the Midianites, the men of Ephraim had, by Gideon's direction, seized the fords of the Jordan, thus preventing the escape of the fugitives. By this means a large number of the enemy were slain, among whom were two princes, Oreb and Zeeb. Thus the men of Ephraim followed up the battle, and helped complete the victory. Nevertheless, they were jealous and angry, as though Gideon had been led by his own will and judgment. They did not discern God's hand in the triumph of Israel, they did not appreciate His power and mercy in their deliverance; and this very fact showed them unworthy to be chosen as His special instruments.

Returning with the trophies of victory, they angrily reproached Gideon: "Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?"

"What have I done now, in comparison of you?" said Gideon. "Is not the *gleaning* of the grapes of Ephraim better than the *vintage* of Abiezer? *God* hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you?"

The spirit of jealousy might easily have been fanned into a quarrel that would have caused strife and bloodshed; but Gideon's modest answer soothed the anger of the men of Ephraim, and they returned in peace to their homes. Firm and uncompromising where principle was concerned, and in war a "mighty man of valor," Gideon displayed also a spirit of courtesy that is rarely witnessed.

The people of Israel, in their gratitude at deliverance from the Midianites, proposed to Gideon that he should become their king, and that the throne should be confirmed to his descendants. This proposition was in direct violation of the principles of the theocracy.

God was the king of Israel, and for them to place a man upon the throne would be a rejection of their Divine Sovereign. Gideon recognized this fact; his answer shows how true and noble were his motives. "I will not rule over you," he declared; "neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you."

But Gideon was betrayed into another error, which brought disaster upon his house and upon all Israel. The season of inactivity that succeeds a great struggle is often fraught with greater danger than is the period of conflict. To this danger Gideon was now exposed. A spirit of unrest was upon him. Hitherto he had been content to fulfill the directions given him from God; but now, instead of waiting for divine guidance, he began to plan for himself. When the armies of the Lord have gained a signal victory, Satan will redouble his efforts to overthrow the work of God. Thus thoughts and plans were suggested to the mind of Gideon, by which the people of Israel were led astray.

Because he had been commanded to offer sacrifice upon the rock where the Angel appeared to him, Gideon concluded that he had been appointed to officiate as a priest. Without waiting for the divine sanction, he determined to provide a suitable place, and to institute a system of worship similar to that carried on at the tabernacle. With the strong popular feeling in his favor he found no difficulty in carrying out his plan. At his request all the earrings of gold taken from the Midianites were given him as his share of the spoil. The people also collected many other costly materials, together with the richly adorned garments of the princes of Midian. From the material thus furnished, Gideon constructed an ephod and a breastplate, in imitation of those worn by the high priest. His course proved a snare to himself and his family, as well as to Israel. The unauthorized worship led many of the people finally to forsake the Lord altogether, to serve idols. After Gideon's death great numbers, among whom were his own family, joined in this apostasy. The people were led away from God by the very man who had once overthrown their idolatry.

There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts. How often the errors of parents produce the most

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disastrous effects upon their children and children's children, long after the actors themselves have been laid in the grave. Everyone is exerting an influence upon others, and will be held accountable for the result of that influence. Words and actions have a telling power, and the long hereafter will show the effect of our life here. The impression made by our words and deeds will surely react upon ourselves in blessing or in cursing. This thought gives an awful solemnity to life, and should draw us to God in humble prayer that He will guide us by His wisdom.

Those who stand in the highest positions may lead astray. The wisest err; the strongest may falter and stumble. There is need that light from above should be constantly shed upon our pathway. Our only safety lies in trusting our way implicitly to Him who has said, "Follow Me."

After the death of Gideon "the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel." Forgetful of all that they owed to Gideon, their judge and deliverer, the people of Israel accepted his baseborn son Abimelech as their king, who, to sustain his power, murdered all but one of Gideon's lawful children. When men cast off the fear of God they are not long in departing from honor and integrity. An appreciation of the Lord's mercy will lead to an appreciation of those who, like Gideon, have been employed as instruments to bless His people. The cruel course of Israel toward the house of Gideon was what might be expected from a people who manifested so great ingratitude to God.

After the death of Abimelech the rule of judges who feared the Lord served for a time to put a check upon idolatry, but ere long the people returned to the practices of the heathen communities around them. Among the northern tribes the gods of Syria and Sidon had many worshipers. On the southwest the idols of the Philistines, and on the east those of Moab and Ammon, had turned the hearts of Israel

from the God of their fathers. But apostasy speedily brought its punishment. The Ammonites subdued the eastern tribes and, crossing the Jordan, invaded the territory of Judah and Ephraim. On the west the Philistines came up from their plain beside the sea, burning and pillaging far and near. Again Israel seemed to be abandoned to the power of relentless foes.

Again the people sought help from Him whom they had so forsaken and insulted. "The children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim." But sorrow had not worked true repentance. The people mourned because their sins had brought suffering upon themselves, but not because they had dishonored God by transgression of His holy law. True repentance is more than sorrow for sin. It is a resolute turning away from evil.

The Lord answered them through one of His prophets: "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to Me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation."

These solemn and fearful words carry the mind forward to another scene—the great day of final judgment—when the rejecters of God's mercy and the despisers of His grace shall be brought face to face with His justice. At that tribunal must they render an account who have devoted their God-given talents of time, of means, or of intellect, to serving the gods of this world. They have forsaken their true and loving Friend, to follow the path of convenience and worldly pleasure. They intended at some time to return to God; but the world with its follies and deceptions absorbed the attention. Frivolous amusements, pride of dress, indulgence of appetite, hardened the heart and benumbed the conscience, so that the voice of truth was not heard. Duty was despised. Things of infinite value were lightly esteemed,

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until the heart lost all desire to sacrifice for Him who has given so much for man. But in the reaping time they will gather that which they have sown.

Saith the Lord: "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: . . . when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of My counsel: they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." "But whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Proverbs 1:24-31, 33.

The Israelites now humbled themselves before the Lord. "And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served Jehovah." And the Lord's heart of love was grieved—"was grieved for the misery of Israel." Oh, the long-suffering mercy of our God! When His people put away the sins that had shut out His presence, He heard their prayers and at once began to work for them.

A deliverer was raised up in the person of Jephthah, a Gileadite, who made war upon the Ammonites and effectually destroyed their power. For eighteen years at this time Israel had suffered under the oppression of her foes, yet again the lesson taught by suffering was forgotten.

As His people returned to their evil ways, the Lord permitted them to be still oppressed by their powerful enemies, the Philistines. For many years they were constantly harassed, and at times completely subjugated, by this cruel and warlike nation. They had mingled with these idolaters, uniting with them in pleasure and in worship, until they seemed to be one with them in spirit and interest. Then these professed friends of Israel became their bitterest enemies and sought by every means to accomplish their destruction.

Like Israel, Christians too often yield to the influence of the world

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and conform to its principles and customs, in order to secure the friendship of the ungodly; but in the end it will be found that these professed friends are the most dangerous of foes. The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." 1 John 3:13. Our Saviour says, "Ye know that it hated Me before it hated you." John 15:18. Satan works through the ungodly, under cover of a pretended friendship, to allure God's people into sin, that he may separate them from Him; and when their defense is removed, then he will lead his agents to turn against them and seek to accomplish their destruction.



chapter 54

Samson

AMID the widespread apostasy the faithful worshippers of God continued to plead with Him for the deliverance of Israel. Though there was apparently no response, though year after year the power of the oppressor continued to rest more heavily upon the land, God's providence was preparing help for them. Even in the early years of the Philistine oppression a child was born through whom God designed to humble the power of these mighty foes.

On the border of the hill country overlooking the Philistine plain was the little town of Zorah. Here dwelt the family of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan, one of the few households that amid the general defection had remained true to Jehovah. To the childless wife of Manoah "the Angel of Jehovah" appeared with the message that she should have a son, through whom God would begin to deliver Israel. In view of this the Angel gave her instruction concerning her own habits, and also for the treatment of her child: "Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing." And the same prohibition was to be imposed, from the first, upon the child, with the addition that his hair should not be cut; for he was to be consecrated to God as a Nazarite from his birth.

This chapter is based on Judges 13 to 16.

In the midst of the pagan revels
Samson leaned mightily against the
huge pillars and felled the temple.

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The woman sought her husband, and, after describing the Angel, she repeated His message. Then, fearful that they should make some mistake in the important work committed to them, the husband prayed, "Let the Man of God which Thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born."

When the Angel again appeared, Manoah's anxious inquiry was, "How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" The previous instruction was repeated—"Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe."

God had an important work for the promised child of Manoah to do, and it was to secure for him the qualifications necessary for this work that the habits of both the mother and the child were to be carefully regulated. "Neither let her drink wine or strong drink," was the Angel's instruction for the wife of Manoah, "nor eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe." The child will be affected for good or for evil by the habits of the mother. She must herself be controlled by principle and must practice temperance and self-denial, if she would seek the welfare of her child. Unwise advisers will urge upon the mother the necessity of gratifying every wish and impulse, but such teaching is false and mischievous. The mother is by the command of God Himself placed under the most solemn obligation to exercise self-control.

And fathers as well as mothers are involved in this responsibility. Both parents transmit their own characteristics, mental and physical, their dispositions and appetites, to their children. As the result of parental intemperance children often lack physical strength and mental and moral power. Liquor drinkers and tobacco users may, and do, transmit their insatiable craving, their inflamed blood and irritable nerves, to their children. The licentious often bequeath their unholy desires, and even loathsome diseases, as a legacy to their offspring. And as the children have less power to resist temptation than had the parents, the tendency is for each generation to fall lower and lower.

To a great degree parents are responsible not only for the violent passions and perverted appetites of their children but for the infirmities of the thousands born deaf, blind, diseased, or idiotic.

The inquiry of every father and mother should be, "What shall we do unto the child that shall be born unto us?" The effect of prenatal influences has been by many lightly regarded; but the instruction sent from heaven to those Hebrew parents, and twice repeated in the most explicit and solemn manner, shows how this matter is looked upon by our Creator.

And it was not enough that the promised child should receive a good legacy from the parents. This must be followed by careful training and the formation of right habits. God directed that the future judge and deliverer of Israel should be trained to strict temperance from infancy. He was to be a Nazarite from his birth, thus being placed under a perpetual prohibition against the use of wine or strong drink. The lessons of temperance, self-denial, and self-control are to be taught to children even from babyhood.

The angel's prohibition included "every unclean thing." The distinction between articles of food as clean and unclean was not a merely ceremonial and arbitrary regulation, but was based upon sanitary principles. To the observance of this distinction may be traced, in a great degree, the marvelous vitality which for thousands of years has distinguished the Jewish people. The principles of temperance must be carried further than the mere use of spirituous liquors. The use of stimulating and indigestible food is often equally injurious to health, and in many cases sows the seeds of drunkenness. True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful. There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. The appetite should ever be in subjection to the moral and intellectual powers. The body should be servant to the mind, and not the mind to the body.

The divine promise to Manoah was in due time fulfilled in the

birth of a son, to whom the name of Samson was given. As the boy grew up it became evident that he possessed extraordinary physical strength. This was not, however, as Samson and his parents well knew, dependent upon his well-knit sinews, but upon his condition as a Nazarite, of which his unshorn hair was a symbol. Had Samson obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him. The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life. A young woman dwelling in the Philistine town of Timnath engaged Samson's affections, and he determined to make her his wife. To his God-fearing parents, who endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, his only answer was, "She pleaseth me well." The parents at last yielded to his wishes, and the marriage took place.

Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time when he must execute his divine mission—the time above all others when he should have been true to God—Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel. He did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing.

How many are pursuing the same course as did Samson! How often marriages are formed between the godly and the ungodly, because inclination governs in the selection of husband or wife! The parties do not ask counsel of God, nor have His glory in view. Christianity ought to have a controlling influence upon the marriage relation, but it is too often the case that the motives which lead to this union are not in keeping with Christian principles. Satan is constantly seeking to strengthen his power over the people of God by inducing them to enter into alliance with his subjects; and in order to accomplish this he endeavors to arouse unsanctified passions in the heart. But the

Lord has in His Word plainly instructed His people not to unite themselves with those who have not His love abiding in them. "What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" 2 Corinthians 6:15, 16.

At his marriage feast Samson was brought into familiar association with those who hated the God of Israel. Whoever voluntarily enters into such relations will feel it necessary to conform, to some degree, to the habits and customs of his companions. The time thus spent is worse than wasted. Thoughts are entertained and words are spoken that tend to break down the strongholds of principle and to weaken the citadel of the soul.

The wife, to obtain whom Samson had transgressed the command of God, proved treacherous to her husband before the close of the marriage feast. Incensed at her perfidy, Samson forsook her for the time, and went alone to his home at Zorah. When, afterward relenting, he returned for his bride, he found her the wife of another. His revenge, in the wasting of all the fields and vineyards of the Philistines, provoked them to murder her, although their threats had driven her to the deceit with which the trouble began. Samson had already given evidence of his marvelous strength by slaying, singlehanded, a young lion, and by killing thirty of the men of Askelon. Now, moved to anger by the barbarous murder of his wife, he attacked the Philistines and smote them "with a great slaughter." Then, wishing a safe retreat from his enemies, he withdrew to "the rock Etam," in the tribe of Judah.

To this place he was pursued by a strong force, and the inhabitants of Judah, in great alarm, basely agreed to deliver him to his enemies. Accordingly three thousand men of Judah went up to him. But even at such odds they would not have dared approach him had they not felt assured that he would not harm his own countrymen. Samson consented to be bound and delivered to the Philistines, but first exacted from the men of Judah a promise not to attack him themselves, and thus compel him to destroy them. He permitted them to bind him

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with two new ropes, and he was led into the camp of his enemies amid demonstrations of great joy. But while their shouts were waking the echoes of the hills, "the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him." He burst asunder the strong new cords as if they had been flax burned in the fire. Then seizing the first weapon at hand, which, though only the jawbone of an ass, was rendered more effective than sword or spear, he smote the Philistines until they fled in terror, leaving a thousand men dead upon the field.

Had the Israelites been ready to unite with Samson and follow up the victory, they might at this time have freed themselves from the power of their oppressors. But they had become dispirited and cowardly. They had neglected the work which God commanded them to perform, in dispossessing the heathen, and had united with them in their degrading practices, tolerating their cruelty, and, so long as it was not directed against themselves, even countenancing their injustice. When themselves brought under the power of the oppressor, they tamely submitted to the degradation which they might have escaped, had they only obeyed God. Even when the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, they would, not infrequently, desert him and unite with their enemies.

After his victory the Israelites made Samson judge, and he ruled Israel for twenty years. But one wrong step prepares the way for another. Samson had transgressed the command of God by taking a wife from the Philistines, and again he ventured among them—now his deadly enemies—in the indulgence of unlawful passion. Trusting to his great strength, which had inspired the Philistines with such terror, he went boldly to Gaza, to visit a harlot of that place. The inhabitants of the city learned of his presence, and they were eager for revenge. Their enemy was shut safely within the walls of the most strongly fortified of all their cities; they felt sure of their prey, and only waited till the morning to complete their triumph. At midnight Samson was aroused. The accusing voice of conscience filled him with remorse, as he remembered that he had broken his vow as a Nazarite. But notwithstanding his sin, God's mercy had not forsaken him. His prodi-

gious strength again served to deliver him. Going to the city gate, he wrenched it from its place and carried it, with its posts and bars, to the top of a hill on the way to Hebron.

But even this narrow escape did not stay his evil course. He did not again venture among the Philistines, but he continued to seek those sensuous pleasures that were luring him to ruin. "He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek," not far from his own birthplace. Her name was Delilah, "the consumer." The vale of Sorek was celebrated for its vineyards; these also had a temptation for the wavering Nazarete, who had already indulged in the use of wine, thus breaking another tie that bound him to purity and to God. The Philistines kept a vigilant watch over the movements of their enemy, and when he degraded himself by this new attachment, they determined, through Delilah, to accomplish his ruin.

A deputation consisting of one leading man from each of the Philistine provinces was sent to the vale of Sorek. They dared not attempt to seize him while in possession of his great strength, but it was their purpose to learn, if possible, the secret of his power. They therefore bribed Delilah to discover and reveal it.

As the betrayer plied Samson with her questions, he deceived her by declaring that the weakness of other men would come upon him if certain processes were tried. When she put the matter to the test, the cheat was discovered. Then she accused him of falsehood, saying, "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth." Three times Samson had the clearest evidence that the Philistines had leagued with his charmer to destroy him; but when her purpose failed, she treated the matter as a jest, and he blindly banished fear.

Day by day Delilah urged him, until "his soul was vexed unto death;" yet a subtle power kept him by her side. Overcome at last, Samson made known the secret: "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarete unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall

become weak, and be like any other man." A messenger was immediately dispatched to the lords of the Philistines, urging them to come to her without delay. While the warrior slept, the heavy masses of his hair were severed from his head. Then, as she had done three times before, she called, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!" Suddenly awaking, he thought to exert his strength as before and destroy them; but his powerless arms refused to do his bidding, and he knew that "Jehovah was departed from him." When he had been shaven, Delilah began to annoy him and cause him pain, thus making a trial of his strength; for the Philistines dared not approach him till fully convinced that his power was gone. Then they seized him and, having put out both his eyes, they took him to Gaza. Here he was bound with fetters in their prison house and confined to hard labor.

What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him. There was no virtue in his long hair merely, but it was a token of his loyalty to God; and when the symbol was sacrificed in the indulgence of passion, the blessings of which it was a token were also forfeited.

In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance. As his hair grew, his power gradually returned; but his enemies, regarding him as a fettered and helpless prisoner, felt no apprehensions.

The Philistines ascribed their victory to their gods; and, exulting, they defied the God of Israel. A feast was appointed in honor of Dagon, the fish god, "the protector of the sea." From town and country throughout the Philistine plain the people and their lords assembled. Throngs of worshipers filled the vast temple and crowded the galleries about the roof. It was a scene of festivity and rejoicing. There was the pomp of the sacrificial service, followed by music and feasting. Then,

as the crowning trophy of Dagon's power, Samson was brought in. Shouts of exultation greeted his appearance. People and rulers mocked his misery and adored the god who had overthrown "the destroyer of their country." After a time, as if weary, Samson asked permission to rest against the two central pillars which supported the temple roof. Then he silently uttered the prayer, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines." With these words he encircled the pillars with his mighty arms; and crying, "Let me die with the Philistines!" he bowed himself, and the roof fell, destroying at one crash all that vast multitude. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

The idol and its worshipers, priest and peasant, warrior and noble, were buried together beneath the ruins of Dagon's temple. And among them was the giant form of him whom God had chosen to be the deliverer of His people. Tidings of the terrible overthrow were carried to the land of Israel, and Samson's kinsmen came down from their hills, and, unopposed, rescued the body of the fallen hero. And they "brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying place of Manoah his father."

God's promise that through Samson He would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death.

Physically, Samson was the strongest man upon the earth; but in self-control, integrity, and firmness, he was one of the weakest of men. Many mistake strong passions for a strong character, but the truth is that he who is mastered by his passions is a weak man. The real greatness of the man is measured by the power of the feelings that he controls, not by those that control him.

God's providential care had been over Samson, that he might be

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prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man's only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later.

The very ones whom God purposes to use as His instruments for a special work, Satan employs his utmost power to lead astray. He attacks us at our weak points, working through defects in the character to gain control of the whole man; and he knows that if these defects are cherished, he will succeed. But none need be overcome. Man is not left alone to conquer the power of evil by his own feeble efforts. Help is at hand and will be given to every soul who really desires it. Angels of God, that ascend and descend the ladder which Jacob saw in vision, will help every soul who will, to climb even to the highest heaven.

The Child Samuel

ELKANAH, a Levite of Mount Ephraim, was a man of wealth and influence, and one who loved and feared the Lord. His wife, Hannah, was a woman of fervent piety. Gentle and unassuming, her character was marked with deep earnestness and a lofty faith.

The blessing so earnestly sought by every Hebrew was denied this godly pair; their home was not gladdened by the voice of childhood; and the desire to perpetuate his name led the husband—as it had led many others—to contract a second marriage. But this step, prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded, and she bore herself with pride and insolence. To Hannah, hope seemed crushed and life a weary burden; yet she met the trial with uncomplaining meekness.

Elkanah faithfully observed the ordinances of God. The worship at Shiloh was still maintained, but on account of irregularities in the ministration his services were not required at the sanctuary, to which, being a Levite, he was to give attendance. Yet he went up with his family to worship and sacrifice at the appointed gatherings.

Even amid the sacred festivities connected with the service of God

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 1; 2:1-11.

the evil spirit that had cursed his home intruded. After presenting the thank offerings, all the family, according to the established custom, united in a solemn yet joyous feast. Upon these occasions Elkanah gave the mother of his children a portion for herself and for each of her sons and daughters; and in token of regard for Hannah, he gave her a double portion, signifying that his affection for her was the same as if she had had a son. Then the second wife, fired with jealousy, claimed the precedence as one highly favored of God, and taunted Hannah with her childless state as evidence of the Lord's displeasure. This was repeated from year to year, until Hannah could endure it no longer. Unable to hide her grief, she wept without restraint, and withdrew from the feast. Her husband vainly sought to comfort her. "Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved?" he said; and "am I not better to thee than ten sons?"

Hannah uttered no reproach. The burden which she could share with no earthly friend she cast upon God. Earnestly she pleaded that He would take away her reproach and grant her the precious gift of a son to nurture and train for Him. And she made a solemn vow that if her request were granted, she would dedicate her child to God, even from its birth. Hannah had drawn near to the entrance of the tabernacle, and in the anguish of her spirit she "prayed, . . . and wept sore." Yet she communed with God in silence, uttering no sound. In those evil times such scenes of worship were rarely witnessed. Irreverent feasting and even drunkenness were not uncommon, even at the religious festivals; and Eli the high priest, observing Hannah, supposed that she was overcome with wine. Thinking to administer a deserved rebuke, he said sternly, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."

Pained and startled, Hannah answered gently, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."

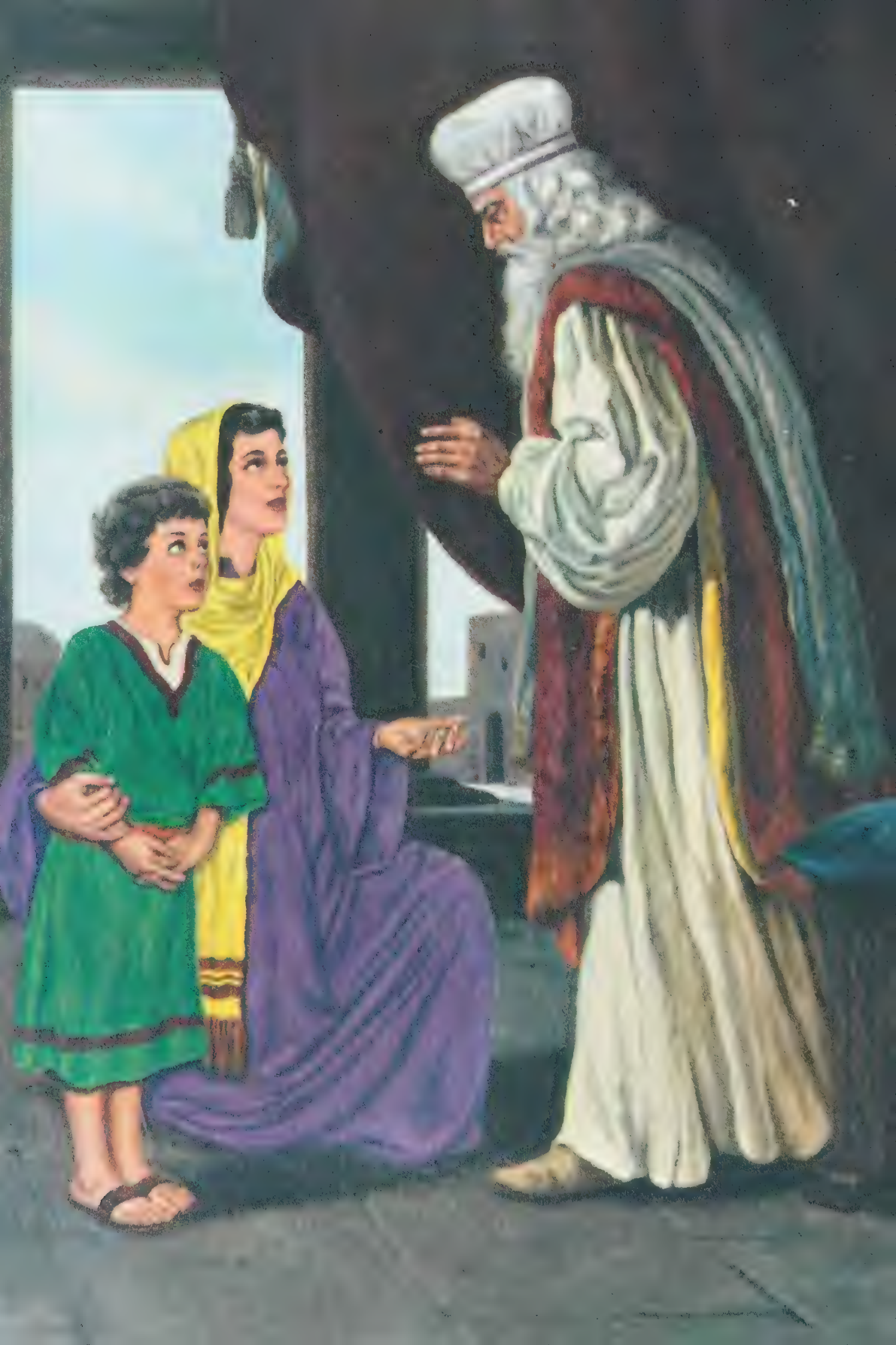
The high priest was deeply moved, for he was a man of God; and in place of rebuke he uttered a blessing: "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him."

Hannah's prayer was granted; she received the gift for which she had so earnestly entreated. As she looked upon the child, she called him Samuel—"asked of God." As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from his mother, she fulfilled her vow. She loved her child with all the devotion of a mother's heart; day by day, as she watched his expanding powers and listened to his childish prattle, her affections entwined about him more closely. He was her only son, the special gift of Heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver His own.

Once more Hannah journeyed with her husband to Shiloh and presented to the priest, in the name of God, her precious gift, saying, "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." Eli was deeply impressed by the faith and devotion of this woman of Israel. Himself an over-indulgent father, he was awed and humbled as he beheld this mother's great sacrifice in parting with her only child, that she might devote him to the service of God. He felt reproved for his own selfish love, and in humiliation and reverence he bowed before the Lord and worshiped.

The mother's heart was filled with joy and praise, and she longed to pour forth her gratitude to God. The Spirit of Inspiration came upon her; "and Hannah prayed, and said:

"My heart rejoiceth in the Lord;
 Mine horn is exalted in the Lord;
 My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies;
 Because I rejoice in Thy salvation.
 There is none holy as the Lord:
 For there is none beside Thee:
 Neither is there any rock like our God.
 Talk no more so exceeding proudly;
 Let not arrogancy come out of your mouth;



For Jehovah is a God of knowledge,
 And by Him actions are weighed. . . .
 The Lord killeth, and maketh alive:
 He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.
 The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich:
 He bringeth low, and lifteth up.
 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
 And lifteth up the beggar from the dunhill,
 To set them among princes,
 And to make them inherit the throne of glory:
 For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
 And He hath set the world upon them.
 He will keep the feet of His saints,
 And the wicked shall be silent in darkness;
 For by strength shall no man prevail.
 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
 Out of heaven shall He thunder upon them:
 The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth;
 And He shall give strength unto His king,
 And exalt the horn of His anointed."

Hannah's words were prophetic, both of David, who should reign as king of Israel, and of the Messiah, the Lord's Anointed. Referring first to the boasting of an insolent and contentious woman, the song points to the destruction of the enemies of God and the final triumph of His redeemed people.

From Shiloh, Hannah quietly returned to her home at Ramah, leaving the child Samuel to be trained for service in the house of God, under the instruction of the high priest. From the earliest dawn of intellect she had taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord's. By every familiar object surrounding him she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother's solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might

To fulfill her vow, Hannah brought
 little Samuel to the temple to be
 of service to Eli, the high priest.

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attain that greatness which Heaven values—that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.

What a reward was Hannah's! and what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example! There are opportunities of inestimable worth, interests infinitely precious, committed to every mother. The humble round of duties which women have come to regard as a wearisome task should be looked upon as a grand and noble work. It is the mother's privilege to bless the world by her influence, and in doing this she will bring joy to her own heart. She may make straight paths for the feet of her children, through sunshine and shadow, to the glorious heights above. But it is only when she seeks, in her own life, to follow the teachings of Christ that the mother can hope to form the character of her children after the divine pattern. The world teems with corrupting influences. Fashion and custom exert a strong power over the young. If the mother fails in her duty to instruct, guide, and restrain, her children will naturally accept the evil, and turn from the good. Let every mother go often to her Saviour with the prayer, "Teach us, how shall we order the child, and what shall we do unto him?" Let her heed the instruction which God has given in His Word, and wisdom will be given her as she shall have need.

"The child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men." Though Samuel's youth was passed at the tabernacle devoted to the worship of God, he was not free from evil influences or sinful example. The sons of Eli feared not God, nor honored their father; but Samuel did not seek their company nor follow their evil ways. It was his constant endeavor to become what God would have him. This is the privilege of every youth. God is pleased when even little children give themselves to His service.

Samuel had been placed under the care of Eli, and the loveliness of his character drew forth the warm affection of the aged priest. He was kind, generous, obedient, and respectful. Eli, pained by the waywardness of his own sons, found rest and comfort and blessing in the presence of his charge. Samuel was helpful and affectionate, and no father ever loved his child more tenderly than did Eli this youth. It

was a singular thing that between the chief magistrate of the nation and the simple child so warm an affection should exist. As the infirmities of age came upon Eli, and he was filled with anxiety and remorse by the profligate course of his own sons, he turned to Samuel for comfort.

It was not customary for the Levites to enter upon their peculiar services until they were twenty-five years of age, but Samuel had been an exception to this rule. Every year saw more important trusts committed to him; and while he was yet a child, a linen ephod was placed upon him as a token of his consecration to the work of the sanctuary. Young as he was when brought to minister in the tabernacle, Samuel had even then duties to perform in the service of God, according to his capacity. These were at first very humble, and not always pleasant; but they were performed to the best of his ability, and with a willing heart. His religion was carried into every duty of life. He regarded himself as God's servant, and his work as God's work. His efforts were accepted, because they were prompted by love to God and a sincere desire to do His will. It was thus that Samuel became a co-worker with the Lord of heaven and earth. And God fitted him to accomplish a great work for Israel.

If children were taught to regard the humble round of everyday duties as the course marked out for them by the Lord, as a school in which they were to be trained to render faithful and efficient service, how much more pleasant and honorable would their work appear. To perform every duty as unto the Lord, throws a charm around the humblest employment and links the workers on earth with the holy beings who do God's will in heaven.

Success in this life, success in gaining the future life, depends upon a faithful, conscientious attention to the little things. Perfection is seen in the least, no less than in the greatest, of the works of God. The hand that hung the worlds in space is the hand that wrought with delicate skill the lilies of the field. And as God is perfect in His sphere, so we are to be perfect in ours. The symmetrical structure of a strong, beautiful character is built up by individual acts of duty.

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And faithfulness should characterize our life in the least as well as in the greatest of its details. Integrity in little things, the performance of little acts of fidelity and little deeds of kindness, will gladden the path of life; and when our work on earth is ended, it will be found that every one of the little duties faithfully performed has exerted an influence for good—an influence that can never perish.

The youth of our time may become as precious in the sight of God as was Samuel. By faithfully maintaining their Christian integrity, they may exert a strong influence in the work of reform. Such men are needed at this time. God has a work for every one of them. Never did men achieve greater results for God and humanity than may be achieved in this our day by those who will be faithful to their God-given trust.

Eli and His Sons

ELI was priest and judge in Israel. He held the highest and most responsible positions among the people of God. As a man divinely chosen for the sacred duties of the priesthood, and set over the land as the highest judicial authority, he was looked up to as an example, and he wielded a great influence over the tribes of Israel. But although he had been appointed to govern the people, he did not rule his own household. Eli was an indulgent father. Loving peace and ease, he did not exercise his authority to correct the evil habits and passions of his children. Rather than contend with them or punish them, he would submit to their will and give them their own way. Instead of regarding the education of his sons as one of the most important of his responsibilities, he treated the matter as of little consequence. The priest and judge of Israel had not been left in darkness as to the duty of restraining and governing the children that God had given to his care. But Eli shrank from this duty, because it involved crossing the will of his sons, and would make it necessary to punish and deny them. Without weighing the terrible consequences that would follow his course, he indulged his children in whatever they desired and neglected the work of fitting them for the service of God and the duties of life.

God had said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will *command*

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 2:12-36.

his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Genesis 18:19. But Eli allowed his children to control him. The father became subject to the children. The curse of transgression was apparent in the corruption and evil that marked the course of his sons. They had no proper appreciation of the character of God or of the sacredness of His law. His service was to them a common thing. From childhood they had been accustomed to the sanctuary and its service; but instead of becoming more reverent, they had lost all sense of its holiness and significance. The father had not corrected their want of reverence for his authority, had not checked their disrespect for the solemn services of the sanctuary; and when they reached manhood, they were full of the deadly fruits of skepticism and rebellion.

Though wholly unfit for the office, they were placed as priests in the sanctuary to minister before God. The Lord had given the most specific directions in regard to offering sacrifices; but these wicked men carried their disregard of authority into the service of God, and did not give attention to the law of the offerings, which were to be made in the most solemn manner. The sacrifices, pointing forward to the death of Christ, were designed to preserve in the hearts of the people faith in the Redeemer to come; hence it was of the greatest importance that the Lord's directions concerning them should be strictly heeded. The peace offerings were especially an expression of thanksgiving to God. In these offerings the fat alone was to be burned upon the altar; a certain specified portion was reserved for the priests, but the greater part was returned to the offerer, to be eaten by him and his friends in a sacrificial feast. Thus all hearts were to be directed, in gratitude and faith, to the great Sacrifice that was to take away the sin of the world.

The sons of Eli, instead of realizing the solemnity of this symbolic service, only thought how they could make it a means of self-indulgence. Not content with the part of the peace offerings allotted them, they demanded an additional portion; and the great number of these sacrifices presented at the annual feasts gave the priests an opportunity

to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. They not only demanded more than their right, but refused to wait even until the fat had been burned as an offering to God. They persisted in claiming whatever portion pleased them, and, if denied, threatened to take it by violence.

This irreverence on the part of the priests soon robbed the service of its holy and solemn significance, and the people "abhorred the offering of the Lord." The great antitypical sacrifice to which they were to look forward was no longer recognized. "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord."

These unfaithful priests also transgressed God's law and dishonored their sacred office by their vile and degrading practices; yet they continued to pollute by their presence the tabernacle of God. Many of the people, filled with indignation at the corrupt course of Hophni and Phinehas, ceased to come up to the appointed place of worship. Thus the service which God had ordained was despised and neglected because associated with the sins of wicked men, while those whose hearts were inclined to evil were emboldened in sin. Ungodliness, profligacy, and even idolatry prevailed to a fearful extent.

Eli had greatly erred in permitting his sons to minister in holy office. By excusing their course, on one pretext and another, he became blinded to their sins; but at last they reached a pass where he could no longer hide his eyes from the crimes of his sons. The people complained of their violent deeds, and the high priest was grieved and distressed. He dared remain silent no longer. But his sons had been brought up to think of no one but themselves, and now they cared for no one else. They saw the grief of their father, but their hard hearts were not touched. They heard his mild admonitions, but they were not impressed, nor would they change their evil course though warned of the consequences of their sin. Had Eli dealt justly with his wicked sons, they would have been rejected from the priestly office and punished with death. Dreading thus to bring public disgrace and condemnation upon them, he sustained them in the most sacred positions of trust. He still permitted them to mingle their corruption with the

holy service of God and to inflict upon the cause of truth an injury which years could not efface. But when the judge of Israel neglected his work, God took the matter in hand.

"There came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon Mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at My sacrifice and at Mine offering, which I have commanded in My habitation; and honorest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel My people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me forever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. . . . And I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine anointed forever."

God charged Eli with honoring his sons above the Lord. Eli had permitted the offering appointed by God as a blessing to Israel to be made a thing of abhorrence, rather than bring his sons to shame for their impious and abominable practices. Those who follow their own inclination, in blind affection for their children, indulging them in the gratification of their selfish desires, and do not bring to bear the authority of God to rebuke sin and correct evil, make it manifest that they are honoring their wicked children more than they honor God. They are more anxious to shield their reputation than to glorify God; more desirous to please their children than to please the Lord and to keep His service from every appearance of evil.

God held Eli, as a priest and judge of Israel, accountable for the moral and religious standing of his people, and in a special sense for the character of his sons. He should first have attempted to restrain

evil by mild measures; but if these did not avail, he should have subdued the wrong by the severest means. He incurred the Lord's displeasure by not reproofing sin and executing justice upon the sinner. He could not be depended upon to keep Israel pure. Those who have too little courage to reprove wrong, or who through indolence or lack of interest make no earnest effort to purify the family or the church of God, are held accountable for the evil that may result from their neglect of duty. We are just as responsible for evils that we might have checked in others by exercise of parental or pastoral authority as if the acts had been our own.

Eli did not manage his household according to God's rules for family government. He followed his own judgment. The fond father overlooked the faults and sins of his sons in their childhood, flattering himself that after a time they would outgrow their evil tendencies. Many are now making a similar mistake. They think they know a better way of training their children than that which God has given in His Word. They foster wrong tendencies in them, urging as an excuse, "They are too young to be punished. Wait till they become older, and can be reasoned with." Thus wrong habits are left to strengthen until they become second nature. The children grow up without restraint, with traits of character that are a lifelong curse to them and are liable to be reproduced in others.

There is no greater curse upon households than to allow the youth to have their own way. When parents regard every wish of their children and indulge them in what they know is not for their good, the children soon lose all respect for their parents, all regard for the authority of God or man, and are led captive at the will of Satan. The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments.

Because of Eli's position, his influence was more extended than if he had been an ordinary man. His family life was imitated throughout Israel. The baleful results of his negligent, ease-loving ways were seen in thousands of homes that were molded by his example. If chil-

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dren are indulged in evil practices, while the parents make a profession of religion, the truth of God is brought into reproach. The best test of the Christianity of a home is the type of character begotten by its influence. Actions speak louder than the most positive profession of godliness. If professors of religion, instead of putting forth earnest, persistent, and painstaking effort to bring up a well-ordered household as a witness to the benefits of faith in God, are lax in their government and indulgent to the evil desires of their children, they are doing as did Eli, and are bringing disgrace on the cause of Christ and ruin upon themselves and their households. But great as are the evils of parental unfaithfulness under any circumstances, they are tenfold greater when they exist in the families of those appointed as teachers of the people. When these fail to control their own households, they are, by their wrong example, misleading many. Their guilt is as much greater than that of others as their position is more responsible.

The promise had been made that the house of Aaron should walk before God forever; but this promise had been made on condition that they should devote themselves to the work of the sanctuary with singleness of heart and honor God in all their ways, not serving self nor following their own perverse inclinations. Eli and his sons had been tested, and the Lord had found them wholly unworthy of the exalted position of priests in His service. And God declared, "Be it far from Me." He could not accomplish the good that He had meant to do them, because they failed to do their part.

The example of those who minister in holy things should be such as to impress the people with reverence for God and with fear to offend Him. When men, standing "in Christ's stead" (2 Corinthians 5:20) to speak to the people God's message of mercy and reconciliation, use their sacred calling as a cloak for selfish or sensual gratification, they make themselves the most effective agents of Satan. Like Hophni and Phinehas, they cause men to "abhor the offering of the Lord." They may pursue their evil course in secret for a time; but when at last their true character is exposed, the faith of the people receives a shock that often results in destroying their confidence in

religion. There is left upon the mind a distrust of all who profess to teach the Word of God. The message of the true servant of Christ is doubtfully received. The question constantly arises, "Will not this man prove to be like the one we thought so holy, and found so corrupt?" Thus the Word of God loses its power upon the souls of men.

In Eli's reproof to his sons are words of solemn and fearful import—words that all who minister in sacred things would do well to ponder: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" Had their crimes injured only their fellow men, the judge might have made reconciliation by appointing a penalty and requiring restitution; and thus the offenders might have been pardoned. Or had they not been guilty of a presumptuous sin, a sin offering might have been presented for them. But their sins were so interwoven with their ministration as priests of the Most High, in offering sacrifice for sin, the work of God was so profaned and dishonored before the people, that no expiation could be accepted for them. Their own father, though himself high priest, dared not make intercession in their behalf; he could not shield them from the wrath of a holy God. Of all sinners, those are most guilty who cast contempt upon the means that Heaven has provided for man's redemption—who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." Hebrews 6:6.



chapter 57

The Ark Taken by the Philistines

ANOTHER warning was to be given to Eli's house. God could not communicate with the high priest and his sons; their sins, like a thick cloud, had shut out the presence of His Holy Spirit. But in the midst of evil the child Samuel remained true to Heaven, and the message of condemnation to the house of Eli was Samuel's commission as a prophet of the Most High.

"The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the Lord called Samuel." Supposing the voice to be that of Eli, the child hastened to the bedside of the priest, saying, "Here am I; for thou calledst me." The answer was, "I called not, my son; lie down again." Three times Samuel was called, and thrice he responded in like manner. And then Eli was convinced that the mysterious call was the voice of God. The Lord had passed by His chosen servant, the man of hoary hairs, to commune with a child. This in itself was a bitter yet deserved rebuke to Eli and his house.

No feeling of envy or jealousy was awakened in Eli's heart. He

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 3 to 7.

In the midst of the fighting between
Israel and Philistia, the ark of the
covenant was captured by the pagans.

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directed Samuel to answer, if again called, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Once more the voice was heard, and the child answered, "Speak; for Thy servant heareth." So awed was he at the thought that the great God should speak to him that he could not remember the exact words which Eli bade him say.

"And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever."

Before receiving this message from God, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him;" that is, he was not acquainted with such direct manifestations of God's presence as were granted to the prophets. It was the Lord's purpose to reveal Himself in an unexpected manner, that Eli might hear of it through the surprise and inquiry of the youth.

Samuel was filled with fear and amazement at the thought of having so terrible a message committed to him. In the morning he went about his duties as usual, but with a heavy burden upon his young heart. The Lord had not commanded him to reveal the fearful denunciation, hence he remained silent, avoiding, as far as possible, the presence of Eli. He trembled, lest some question should compel him to declare the divine judgments against one whom he loved and revered. Eli was confident that the message foretold some great calamity to him and his house. He called Samuel, and charged him to relate faithfully what the Lord had revealed. The youth obeyed, and the aged man bowed in humble submission to the appalling sentence. "It is the Lord," he said: "let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Yet Eli did not manifest the fruits of true repentance. He confessed his guilt, but failed to renounce the sin. Year after year the

Lord delayed His threatened judgments. Much might have been done in those years to redeem the failures of the past, but the aged priest took no effective measures to correct the evils that were polluting the sanctuary of the Lord and leading thousands in Israel to ruin. The forbearance of God caused Hophni and Phinehas to harden their hearts and to become still bolder in transgression. The messages of warning and reproof to his house were made known by Eli to the whole nation. By this means he hoped to counteract, in some measure, the evil influence of his past neglect. But the warnings were disregarded by the people, as they had been by the priests. The people of surrounding nations also, who were not ignorant of the iniquities openly practiced in Israel, became still bolder in their idolatry and crime. They felt no sense of guilt for their sins, as they would have felt had the Israelites preserved their integrity. But a day of retribution was approaching. God's authority had been set aside, and His worship neglected and despised, and it became necessary for Him to interpose, that the honor of His name might be maintained.

"Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek." This expedition was undertaken by the Israelites without counsel from God, without the concurrence of high priest or prophet. "And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men." As the shattered and disheartened force returned to their encampment, "the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?" The nation was ripe for the judgments of God, yet they did not see that their own sins had been the cause of this terrible disaster. And they said, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." The Lord had given no command or permission that the ark should come into the army; yet the Israelites felt confident that victory would be theirs, and uttered a great shout when it was borne into the camp by the sons of Eli.

The Philistines looked upon the ark as the god of Israel. All the mighty works that Jehovah had wrought for His people were attributed to its power. As they heard the shouts of joy at its approach, they said, "What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God has come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight."

The Philistines made a fierce assault, which resulted in the defeat of Israel, with great slaughter. Thirty thousand men lay dead upon the field, and the ark of God was taken, the two sons of Eli having fallen while fighting to defend it. Thus again was left upon the page of history a testimony for all future ages—that the iniquity of God's professed people will not go unpunished. The greater the knowledge of God's will, the greater the sin of those who disregard it.

The most terrifying calamity that could occur had befallen Israel. The ark of God had been captured, and was in the possession of the enemy. The glory had indeed departed from Israel when the symbol of the abiding presence and power of Jehovah was removed from the midst of them. With this sacred chest were associated the most wonderful revelations of God's truth and power. In former days miraculous victories had been achieved whenever it appeared. It was shadowed by the wings of the golden cherubim, and the unspeakable glory of the Shekinah, the visible symbol of the most high God, had rested over it in the holy of holies. But now it had brought no victory. It had not proved a defense on this occasion, and there was mourning throughout Israel.

They had not realized that their faith was only a nominal faith, and had lost its power to prevail with God. The law of God, contained

in the ark, was also a symbol of His presence; but they had cast contempt upon the commandments, had despised their requirements, and had grieved the Spirit of the Lord from among them. When the people obeyed the holy precepts, the Lord was with them to work for them by His infinite power; but when they looked upon the ark, and did not associate it with God, nor honor His revealed will by obedience to His law, it could avail them little more than a common box. They looked to the ark as the idolatrous nations looked to their gods, as if it possessed in itself the elements of power and salvation. They transgressed the law it contained; for their very worship of the ark led to formalism, hypocrisy, and idolatry. Their sin had separated them from God, and He could not give them the victory until they had repented of and forsaken their iniquity.

It was not enough that the ark and the sanctuary were in the midst of Israel. It was not enough that the priests offered sacrifices, and that the people were called the children of God. The Lord does not regard the request of those who cherish iniquity in the heart; it is written that "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Proverbs 28:9.

When the army went out to battle, Eli, blind and old, had tarried at Shiloh. It was with troubled forebodings that he awaited the result of the conflict; "for his heart trembled for the ark of God." Taking his position outside the gate of the tabernacle, he sat by the highway side day after day, anxiously expecting the arrival of a messenger from the battlefield.

At length a Benjamite from the army, "with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head," came hurrying up the ascent leading to the city. Passing heedlessly the aged man beside the way, he rushed on to the town, and repeated to eager throngs the tidings of defeat and loss.

The sound of wailing and lamentation reached the watcher beside the tabernacle. The messenger was brought to him. And the man said unto Eli, "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead." Eli could endure all this, terrible as it was,

for he had expected it. But when the messenger added, "And the ark of God is taken," a look of unutterable anguish passed over his countenance. The thought that his sin had thus dishonored God and caused Him to withdraw His presence from Israel was more than he could bear; his strength was gone, he fell, "and his neck brake, and he died."

The wife of Phinehas, notwithstanding the impiety of her husband, was a woman who feared the Lord. The death of her father-in-law and her husband, and above all, the terrible tidings that the ark of God was taken, caused her death. She felt that the last hope of Israel was gone; and she named the child born in this hour of adversity, Ichabod, or "inglorious;" with her dying breath mournfully repeating the words, "The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."

But the Lord had not wholly cast aside His people, nor would He long suffer the exultation of the heathen. He had used the Philistines as the instrument to punish Israel, and He employed the ark to punish the Philistines. In time past the divine Presence had attended it, to be the strength and glory of His obedient people. That invisible Presence would still attend it, to bring terror and destruction to the transgressors of His holy law. The Lord often employs His bitterest enemies to punish the unfaithfulness of His professed people. The wicked may triumph for a time as they see Israel suffering chastisement, but the time will come when they, too, must meet the sentence of a holy, sin-hating God. Wherever iniquity is cherished, there, swift and unerring, the divine judgments will follow.

The Philistines removed the ark in triumph to Ashdod, one of their five principal cities, and placed it in the house of their god Dagon. They imagined that the power which had hitherto attended the ark would be theirs, and that this, united with the power of Dagon, would render them invincible. But upon entering the temple on the following day, they beheld a sight which filled them with consternation. Dagon had fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of Jehovah. The priests reverently lifted the idol and restored it to its place. But the next morning they found it, strangely mutilated, again lying upon the earth before the ark. The upper part of this idol was like that of a

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man, and the lower part was in the likeness of a fish. Now every part that resembled the human form had been cut off, and only the body of the fish remained. Priests and people were horror-struck; they looked upon this mysterious event as an evil omen, foreboding destruction to themselves and their idols before the God of the Hebrews. They now removed the ark from their temple and placed it in a building by itself.

The inhabitants of Ashdod were smitten with a distressing and fatal disease. Remembering the plagues that were inflicted upon Egypt by the God of Israel, the people attributed their afflictions to the presence of the ark among them. It was decided to convey it to Gath. But the plague followed close upon its removal, and the men of that city sent it to Ekron. Here the people received it with terror, crying, "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people." They turned to their gods for protection, as the people of Gath and Ashdod had done; but the work of the destroyer went on, until, in their distress, "the cry of the city went up to heaven." Fearing longer to retain the ark among the homes of men, the people next placed it in the open field. There followed a plague of mice, which infested the land, destroying the products of the soil, both in the storehouse and in the field. Utter destruction, by disease or famine, now threatened the nation.

For seven months the ark remained in Philistia, and during all this time the Israelites made no effort for its recovery. But the Philistines were now as anxious to free themselves from its presence as they had been to obtain it. Instead of being a source of strength to them, it was a great burden and a heavy curse. Yet they knew not what course to pursue; for wherever it went the judgments of God followed. The people called for the princes of the nation, with the priests and diviners, and eagerly inquired, "What shall we do to the ark of Jehovah? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place?" They were advised to return it with a costly trespass offering. "Then," said the priests, "ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

To ward off or to remove a plague, it was anciently the custom among the heathen to make an image in gold, silver, or other material, of that which caused the destruction, or of the object or part of the body specially affected. This was set up on a pillar or in some conspicuous place, and was supposed to be an effectual protection against the evils thus represented. A simliar practice still exists among some heathen peoples. When a person suffering from disease goes for cure to the temple of his idol, he carries with him a figure of the part affected, which he presents as an offering to his god.

It was in accordance with the prevailing superstition that the Philistine lords directed the people to make representations of the plagues by which they had been afflicted—"five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for," said they, "one plague was on you all, and on your lords."

These wise men acknowledged a mysterious power accompanying the ark—a power which they had no wisdom to meet. Yet they did not counsel the people to turn from their idolatry to serve the Lord. They still hated the God of Israel, though compelled by overwhelming judgments to submit to His authority. Thus sinners may be convinced by the judgments of God that it is in vain to contend against Him. They may be compelled to submit to His power, while at heart they rebel against His control. Such submission cannot save the sinner. The heart must be yielded to God—must be subdued by divine grace—before man's repentance can be accepted.

How great is the long-suffering of God toward the wicked! The idolatrous Philistines and backsliding Israel had alike enjoyed the gifts of His providence. Ten thousand unnoticed mercies were silently falling in the pathway of ungrateful, rebellious men. Every blessing spoke to them of the Giver, but they were indifferent to His love. The forbearance of God was very great toward the children of men; but when they stubbornly persisted in their impenitence, He removed from them His protecting hand. They refused to listen to the voice of God in His created works, and in the warnings, counsels, and reproofs of His word, and thus He was forced to speak to them through judgments.

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There were some among the Philistines who stood ready to oppose the return of the ark to its own land. Such an acknowledgement of the power of Israel's God would be humiliating to the pride of Philistia. But "the priests and the diviners" admonished the people not to imitate the stubbornness of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and thus bring upon themselves still greater afflictions. A plan which won the consent of all was now proposed, and immediately put in execution. The ark, with the golden trespass offering, was placed upon a new cart, thus precluding all danger of defilement; to this cart, or car, were attached two kine upon whose necks a yoke had never been placed. Their calves were shut up at home, and the cows were left free to go where they pleased. If the ark should thus be returned to the Israelites by the way of Beth-shemesh, the nearest city of the Levites, the Philistines would accept this as evidence that the God of Israel had done unto them this great evil; "but if not," they said, "then we shall know that it is not His hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us."

On being set free, the kine turned from their young and, lowing as they went, took the direct road to Beth-shemesh. Guided by no



human hand, the patient animals kept on their way. The divine Presence accompanied the ark, and it passed on safely to the very place designated.

It was now the time of wheat harvest, and the men of Beth-shemesh were reaping in the valley. "And they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt-offering unto the Lord." The lords of the Philistines, who had followed the ark "unto the border of Beth-shemesh," and had witnessed its reception, now returned to Ekron. The plague had ceased, and they were convinced that their calamities had been a judgment from the God of Israel.

The men of Beth-shemesh quickly spread the tidings that the ark was in their possession, and the people from the surrounding country flocked to welcome its return. The ark had been placed upon the stone that first served for an altar, and before it additional sacrifices were offered unto the Lord. Had the worshipers repented of their sins, God's blessing would have attended them. But they were not faithfully obeying His law; and while they rejoiced at the return of the ark as a harbinger of good, they had no true sense of its sacredness. Instead of preparing a suitable place for its reception, they permitted it to remain in the harvest field. As they continued to gaze upon the sacred chest and to talk of the wonderful manner in which it had been restored, they began to conjecture wherein lay its peculiar power. At last, overcome by curiosity, they removed the coverings and ventured to open it.

All Israel had been taught to regard the ark with awe and reverence. When required to remove it from place to place the Levites were not so much as to look upon it. Only once a year was the high priest permitted to behold the ark of God. Even the heathen Philistines had not dared to remove its coverings. Angels of heaven, unseen, ever attended it in all its journeyings. The irreverent daring of the people at Beth-shemesh was speedily punished. Many were smitten with sudden death.

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The survivors were not led by this judgment to repent of their sin, but only to regard the ark with superstitious fear. Eager to be free from its presence, yet not daring to remove it, the Beth-shemites sent a message to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, inviting them to take it away. With great joy the men of this place welcomed the sacred chest. They knew that it was the pledge of divine favor to the obedient and faithful. With solemn gladness they brought it to their city and placed it in the house of Abinadab, a Levite. This man appointed his son Eleazar to take charge of it, and it remained there for many years.

During the years since the Lord first manifested Himself to the son of Hannah, Samuel's call to the prophetic office had come to be acknowledged by the whole nation. By faithfully delivering the divine warning to the house of Eli, painful and trying as the duty had been, Samuel had given proof of his fidelity as Jehovah's messenger; "and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."

The Israelites as a nation still continued in a state of irreligion and idolatry, and as a punishment they remained in subjection to the Philistines. During this time Samuel visited the cities and villages throughout the land, seeking to turn the hearts of the people to the God of their fathers; and his efforts were not without good results. After suffering the oppression of their enemies for twenty years, the Israelites "mourned after the Lord." Samuel counseled them, "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only." Here we see that practical piety, heart religion, was taught in the days of Samuel as taught by Christ when He was upon the earth. Without the grace of Christ the outward forms of religion were valueless to ancient Israel. They are the same to modern Israel.

There is need today of such a revival of true heart religion as was experienced by ancient Israel. Repentance is the first step that must

be taken by all who would return to God. No one can do this work for another. We must individually humble our souls before God and put away our idols. When we have done all that we can do, the Lord will manifest to us His salvation.

With the co-operation of the heads of the tribes, a large assembly was gathered at Mizpeh. Here a solemn fast was held. With deep humiliation the people confessed their sins; and as an evidence of their determination to obey the instructions they had heard, they invested Samuel with the authority of judge.

The Philistines interpreted this gathering to be a council of war, and with a strong force set out to disperse the Israelites before their plans could be matured. The tidings of their approach caused great terror in Israel. The people entreated Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

While Samuel was in the act of presenting a lamb as a burnt offering, the Philistines drew near for battle. Then the Mighty One who had descended upon Sinai amid fire and smoke and thunder, who had parted the Red Sea and made a way through Jordan for the children of Israel, again manifested His power. A terrible storm burst upon the advancing host, and the earth was strewn with the dead bodies of mighty warriors.

The Israelites had stood in silent awe, trembling with hope and fear. When they beheld the slaughter of their enemies, they knew that God had accepted their repentance. Though unprepared for battle, they seized the weapons of the slaughtered Philistines and pursued the fleeing host to Beth-car. This signal victory was gained upon the very field where, twenty years before, Israel had been smitten before the Philistines, the priests slain, and the ark of God taken. For nations as well as for individuals, the path of obedience to God is the path of safety and happiness, while that of transgression leads only to disaster and defeat. The Philistines were now so completely subdued that they surrendered the strongholds which had been taken from Israel and refrained from acts of hostility for many years. Other na-

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tions followed this example, and the Israelites enjoyed peace until the close of Samuel's sole administration.

That the occasion might never be forgotten, Samuel set up, between Mizpeh and Shen, a great stone as a memorial. He called the name of it Ebenezer, "the stone of help," saying to the people, "hitherto hath Jehovah helped us."



chapter 58

The Schools of the Prophets

THE Lord Himself directed the education of Israel. His care was not restricted to their religious interests; whatever affected their mental or physical well-being was also the subject of divine providence, and came within the sphere of divine law.

God had commanded the Hebrews to teach their children His requirements and to make them acquainted with all His dealings with their fathers. This was one of the special duties of every parent—one that was not to be delegated to another. In the place of stranger lips the loving hearts of the father and mother were to give instruction to their children. Thoughts of God were to be associated with all the events of daily life. The mighty works of God in the deliverance of His people and the promises of the Redeemer to come were to be often recounted in the homes of Israel; and the use of figures and symbols caused the lessons given to be more firmly fixed in the memory. The great truths of God's providence and of the future life were impressed on the young mind. It was trained to see God alike in the scenes of nature and the words of revelation. The stars of heaven, the trees and flowers of the field, the lofty mountains, the rippling brooks—all spoke of the Creator. The solemn service of sacrifice and worship at the sanctuary and the utterances of the prophets were a revelation of God.

The schools of the prophets gave
young men training in the sacred
Scriptures as well as in trades.

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Such was the training of Moses in the lowly cabin home in Goshen; of Samuel, by the faithful Hannah; of David, in the hill dwelling at Bethlehem; of Daniel, before the scenes of the captivity separated him from the home of his fathers. Such, too, was the early life of Christ at Nazareth; such the training by which the child Timothy learned from the lips of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15), the truths of Holy Writ.

Further provision was made for the instruction of the young, by the establishment of the schools of the prophets. If a youth desired to search deeper into the truths of the Word of God and to seek wisdom from above, that he might become a teacher in Israel, these schools were open to him. The schools of the prophets were founded by Samuel to serve as a barrier against the widespread corruption, to provide for the moral and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to promote the future prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors. In the accomplishment of this object Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. As they communed with God and studied His Word and His works, wisdom from above was added to their natural endowments. The instructors were men not only well versed in divine truth, but those who had themselves enjoyed communion with God and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and piety.

In Samuel's day there were two of these schools—one at Ramah, the home of the prophet, and the other at Kirjath-jearim, where the ark then was. Others were established in later times.

The pupils of these schools sustained themselves by their own labor in tilling the soil or in some mechanical employment. In Israel this was not thought strange or degrading; indeed, it was regarded a crime to allow children to grow up in ignorance of useful labor. By the command of God every child was taught some trade, even though he was to be educated for holy office. Many of the religious teachers supported themselves by manual labor. Even so late as the time of the apostles,

Paul and Aquila were no less honored because they earned a livelihood by their trade of tentmaking.

The chief subjects of study in these schools were the law of God, with the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. The manner of instruction was far different from that in the theological schools of the present day, from which many students graduate with less real knowledge of God and religious truth than when they entered. In those schools of the olden time it was the grand object of all study to learn the will of God and man's duty toward Him. In the records of sacred history were traced the footsteps of Jehovah. The great truths set forth by the types were brought to view, and faith grasped the central object of all that system—the Lamb of God that was to take away the sin of the world.

A spirit of devotion was cherished. Not only were students taught the duty of prayer, but they were taught how to pray, how to approach their Creator, how to exercise faith in Him, and how to understand and obey the teachings of His Spirit. Sanctified intellects brought forth from the treasure house of God things new and old, and the Spirit of God was manifested in prophecy and sacred song.

Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God. What a contrast between the ancient custom and the uses to which music is now too often devoted! How many employ this gift to exalt self, instead of using it to glorify God! A love for music leads the unwary to unite with world lovers in pleasure gatherings where God has forbidden His children to go. Thus that which is a great blessing when rightly used, becomes one of the most successful agencies by which Satan allures the mind from duty and from the contemplation of eternal things.

Music forms a part of God's worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. The proper training of the voice is an important feature in education and should not be neglected. Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of

worship as is prayer. The heart must feel the spirit of the song to give it right expression.

How wide the difference between those schools taught by the prophets of God and our modern institutions of learning! How few schools are to be found that are not governed by the maxims and customs of the world! There is a deplorable lack of proper restraint and judicious discipline. The existing ignorance of God's Word among a people professedly Christian is alarming. Superficial talk, mere sentimentalism, passes for instruction in morals and religion. The justice and mercy of God, the beauty of holiness and the sure reward of right-doing, the heinous character of sin and the certainty of its terrible results, are not impressed upon the minds of the young. Evil associates are instructing the youth in the ways of crime, dissipation, and licentiousness.

Are there not some lessons which the educators of our day might learn with profit from the ancient schools of the Hebrews? He who created man has provided for his development in body and mind and soul. Hence, real success in education depends upon the fidelity with which men carry out the Creator's plan.

The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life—the object that underlies every other. It is the work of parents and teachers, in the education of the youth, to co-operate with the divine purpose; and in so doing they are "laborers together with God." 1 Corinthians 3:9.

All the varied capabilities that men possess—of mind and soul and body—are given them by God, to be so employed as to reach the highest possible degree of excellence. But this cannot be a selfish and

exclusive culture; for the character of God, whose likeness we are to receive, is benevolence and love. Every faculty, every attribute, with which the Creator has endowed us is to be employed for His glory and for the uplifting of our fellow men. And in this employment is found its purest, noblest, and happiest exercise.

Were this principle given the attention which its importance demands, there would be a radical change in some of the current methods of education. Instead of appealing to pride and selfish ambition, kindling a spirit of emulation, teachers would endeavor to awaken the love for goodness and truth and beauty—to arouse the desire for excellence. The student would seek the development of God's gifts in himself, not to excel others, but to fulfill the purpose of the Creator and to receive His likeness. Instead of being directed to mere earthly standards, or being actuated by the desire for self-exaltation, which in itself dwarfs and belittles, the mind would be directed to the Creator, to know Him and to become like Him.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and *the knowledge of the Holy* is understanding." Proverbs 9:10. The great work of life is character building, and a knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education. To impart this knowledge and to mold the character in harmony with it should be the object of the teacher's work. The law of God is a reflection of His character. Hence the psalmist says, "All Thy commandments are righteousness;" and "through Thy precepts I get understanding." Psalm 119:172, 104. God has revealed Himself to us in His Word and in the works of creation. Through the volume of inspiration and the book of nature we are to obtain a knowledge of God.

It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell. If occupied with commonplace matters only, it will become dwarfed and enfeebled. If never required to grapple with difficult problems, it will after a time almost lose the power of growth. As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. In the Word of God the mind finds subject for the deepest thought, the loftiest aspiration. The Bible is the most instructive history that

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men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research seeks vainly to penetrate. In God's Word we behold the power that laid the foundation of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only can we find a history of our race unsullied by human prejudice or human pride. Here are recorded the struggles, the defeats, and the victories of the greatest men this world has ever known. Here the great problems of duty and destiny are unfolded. The curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. In the reverent contemplation of the truths presented in His Word the mind of the student is brought into communion with the infinite mind. Such a study will not only refine and ennoble the character, but it cannot fail to expand and invigorate the mental powers.

The teaching of the Bible has a vital bearing upon man's prosperity in all the relations of this life. It unfolds the principles that are the cornerstone of a nation's prosperity—principles with which is bound up the well-being of society, and which are the safeguard of the family—principles without which no man can attain usefulness, happiness, and honor in this life, or can hope to secure the future, immortal life. There is no position in life, no phase of human experience, for which the teaching of the Bible is not an essential preparation. Studied and obeyed, the Word of God would give to the world men of stronger and more active intellect than will the closest application to all the subjects that human philosophy embraces. It would give men of strength and solidity of character, of keen perception and sound judgment—men who would be an honor to God and a blessing to the world.

In the study of the sciences also we are to obtain a knowledge of the Creator. All true science is but an interpretation of the handwriting of God in the material world. Science brings from her research only fresh evidences of the wisdom and power of God. Rightly under-

stood, both the book of nature and the Written Word make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which He works.

The student should be led to see God in all the works of creation. Teachers should copy the example of the Great Teacher, who from the familiar scenes of nature drew illustrations that simplified His teachings and impressed them more deeply upon the minds of His hearers. The birds caroling in the leafy branches, the flowers of the valley, the lofty trees, the fruitful lands, the springing grain, the barren soil, the setting sun gilding the heavens with its golden beams—all served as means of instruction. He connected the visible works of the Creator with the words of life which He spoke, that whenever these objects should be presented to the eyes of His hearers, their thoughts might revert to the lessons of truth He had linked with them.

The impress of Deity, manifest in the pages of revelation, is seen upon the lofty mountains, the fruitful valleys, the broad, deep ocean. The things of nature speak to man of his Creator's love. He has linked us to Himself by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. This world is not all sorrow and misery. "God is love," is written upon every opening bud, upon the petals of every flower, and upon every spire of grass. Though the curse of sin has caused the earth to bring forth thorns and thistles, there are flowers upon the thistles and the thorns are hidden by roses. All things in nature testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy. His prohibitions and injunctions are not intended merely to display His authority, but in all that He does He has the well-being of His children in view. He does not require them to give up anything that it would be for their best interest to retain.

The opinion which prevails in some classes of society, that religion is not conducive to health or to happiness in this life, is one of the most mischievous of errors. The Scripture says: "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied." Proverbs 19:23. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speak-

ing guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." Psalm 34:12-14. The words of wisdom "are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." Proverbs 4:22.

True religion brings man into harmony with the laws of God, physical, mental, and moral. It teaches self-control, serenity, temperance. Religion ennobles the mind, refines the taste, and sanctifies the judgment. It makes the soul a partaker of the purity of heaven. Faith in God's love and overruling providence lightens the burdens of anxiety and care. It fills the heart with joy and contentment in the highest or the lowliest lot. Religion tends directly to promote health, to lengthen life, and to heighten our enjoyment of all its blessings. It opens to the soul a never-failing fountain of happiness. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that He has something vastly better to offer them than they are seeking for themselves. Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best, and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression leads to misery and destruction; but wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Proverbs 3:17.

The physical as well as the religious training practiced in the schools of the Hebrews may be profitably studied. The worth of such training is not appreciated. There is an intimate relation between the mind and the body, and in order to reach a high standard of moral and intellectual attainment the laws that control our physical being must be heeded. To secure a strong, well-balanced character, both the mental and the physical powers must be exercised and developed. What study can be more important for the young than that which treats of this wonderful organism that God has committed to us, and of the laws by which it may be preserved in health?

And now, as in the days of Israel, every youth should be instructed in the duties of practical life. Each should acquire a knowledge of some branch of manual labor by which, if need be, he may obtain a livelihood. This is essential, not only as a safeguard against the vicissi-

tudes of life, but from its bearing upon physical, mental, and moral development. Even if it were certain that one would never need to resort to manual labor for his support, still he should be taught to work. Without physical exercise, no one can have a sound constitution and vigorous health; and the discipline of well-regulated labor is no less essential to the securing of a strong and active mind and a noble character.

Every student should devote a portion of each day to active labor. Thus habits of industry would be formed and a spirit of self-reliance encouraged, while the youth would be shielded from many evil and degrading practices that are so often the result of idleness. And this is all in keeping with the primary object of education, for in encouraging activity, diligence, and purity we are coming into harmony with the Creator.

Let the youth be led to understand the object of their creation, to honor God and bless their fellow men; let them see the tender love which the Father in heaven has manifested toward them, and the high destiny for which the discipline of this life is to prepare them, the dignity and honor to which they are called, even to become the sons of God, and thousands would turn with contempt and loathing from the low and selfish aims and the frivolous pleasures that have hitherto engrossed them. They would learn to hate sin and to shun it, not merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment, but from a sense of its inherent baseness, because it would be a degrading of their God-given powers, a stain upon their Godlike manhood.

God does not bid the youth to be less aspiring. The elements of character that make a man successful and honored among men—the irrepressible desire for some greater good, the indomitable will, the strenuous exertion, the untiring perseverance—are not to be crushed out. By the grace of God they are to be directed to objects as much higher than mere selfish and temporal interests as the heavens are higher than the earth. And the education begun in this life will be continued in the life to come. Day by day the wonderful works of God, the evidences of His wisdom and power in creating and sustain-

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ing the universe, the infinite mystery of love and wisdom in the plan of redemption, will open to the mind in new beauty. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9. Even in this life we may catch glimpses of His presence and may taste the joy of communion with Heaven, but the fullness of its joy and blessing will be reached in the hereafter. Eternity alone can reveal the glorious destiny to which man, restored to God's image, may attain.

The First King of Israel

THE government of Israel was administered in the name and by the authority of God. The work of Moses, of the seventy elders, of the rulers and judges, was simply to enforce the laws that God had given; they had no authority to legislate for the nation. This was, and continued to be, the condition of Israel's existence as a nation. From age to age men inspired by God were sent to instruct the people and to direct in the enforcement of the laws.

The Lord foreaw that Israel would desire a king, but He did not consent to a change in the principles upon which the state was founded. The king was to be the vicegerent of the Most High. God was to be recognized as the Head of the nation, and His law was to be enforced as the supreme law of the land.*

When the Israelites first settled in Canaan they acknowledged the principles of the theocracy, and the nation prospered under the rule of Joshua. But increase of population and intercourse with other nations brought a change. The people adopted many of the customs of their heathen neighbors and thus sacrificed to a great degree their own peculiar, holy character. Gradually they lost their reverence for God and ceased to prize the honor of being His chosen people. Attracted by the pomp and display of heathen monarchs, they tired of

* See Appendix, Note 8.

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 8 to 12.

their own simplicity. Jealousy and envy sprang up between the tribes. Internal dissensions made them weak; they were continually exposed to the invasion of their heathen foes, and the people were coming to believe that in order to maintain their standing among the nations, the tribes must be united under a strong central government. As they departed from obedience to God's law, they desired to be freed from the rule of their divine Sovereign; and thus the demand for a monarchy became widespread throughout Israel.

Since the days of Joshua the government had never been conducted with so great wisdom and success as under Samuel's administration. Divinely invested with the threefold office of judge, prophet, and priest, he had labored with untiring and disinterested zeal for the welfare of his people, and the nation had prospered under his wise control. Order had been restored, and godliness promoted, and the spirit of discontent was checked for the time. But with advancing years the prophet was forced to share with others the cares of government, and he appointed his two sons to act as his assistants. While Samuel continued the duties of his office at Ramah, the young men were stationed at Beersheba, to administer justice among the people near the southern border of the land.

It was with the full assent of the nation that Samuel had appointed his sons to office, but they did not prove themselves worthy of their father's choice. The Lord had, through Moses, given special directions to His people that the rulers of Israel should judge righteously, deal justly with the widow and the fatherless, and receive no bribes. But the sons of Samuel "turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." The sons of the prophet had not heeded the precepts which he had sought to impress upon their minds. They had not copied the pure, unselfish life of their father. The warning given to Eli had not exerted the influence upon the mind of Samuel that it should have done. He had been to some extent too indulgent with his sons, and the result was apparent in their character and life.

The injustice of these judges caused much dissatisfaction, and a pretext was thus furnished for urging the change that had long been

secretly desired. "All the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." The cases of abuse among the people had not been referred to Samuel. Had the evil course of his sons been known to him, he would have removed them without delay; but this was not what the petitioners desired. Samuel saw that their real motive was discontent and pride, and that their demand was the result of a deliberate and determined purpose. No complaint had been made against Samuel. All acknowledged the integrity and wisdom of his administration; but the aged prophet looked upon the request as a censure upon himself, and a direct effort to set him aside. He did not, however, reveal his feelings; he uttered no reproach, but carried the matter to the Lord in prayer and sought counsel from Him alone.

And the Lord said unto Samuel: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." The prophet was reprov'd for grieving at the conduct of the people toward himself as an individual. They had not manifested disrespect for him, but for the authority of God, who had appointed the rulers of His people. Those who despise and reject the faithful servant of God show contempt, not merely for the man, but for the Master who sent him. It is God's words, His reproofs and counsel, that are set at nought; it is His authority that is rejected.

The days of Israel's greatest prosperity had been those in which they acknowledged Jehovah as their King—when the laws and the government which He had established were regarded as superior to those of all other nations. Moses had declared to Israel concerning the commandments of the Lord: "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understand-

ing people." Deuteronomy 4:6. But by departing from God's law the Hebrews had failed to become the people that God desired to make them, and then all the evils which were the result of their own sin and folly they charged upon the government of God. So completely had they become blinded by sin.

The Lord had, through His prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king; but it does not follow that this form of government was best for them or according to His will. He permitted the people to follow their own choice, because they refused to be guided by His counsel. Hosea declares that God gave them a king in His anger. Hosea 13:11. When men choose to have their own way, without seeking counsel from God, or in opposition to His revealed will, He often grants their desires, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin. Human pride and wisdom will prove a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing.

God desired His people to look to Him alone as their Law-giver and their Source of strength. Feeling their dependence upon God, they would be constantly drawn nearer to Him. They would become elevated and ennobled, fitted for the high destiny to which He had called them as His chosen people. But when a man was placed upon the throne, it would tend to turn the minds of the people from God. They would trust more to human strength, and less to divine power, and the errors of their king would lead them into sin and separate the nation from God.

Samuel was instructed to grant the request of the people, but to warn them of the Lord's disapproval, and also make known what would be the result of their course. "And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king." He faithfully set before them the burdens that would be laid upon them, and showed the contrast between such a state of oppression and their present comparatively free and prosperous condition. Their king would imitate the pomp and luxury of other monarchs, to support which, grievous

exactions upon their persons and property would be necessary. The goodliest of their young men he would require for his service. They would be made charioteers and horsemen and runners before him. They must fill the ranks of his army, and they would be required to till *his* fields, to reap *his* harvests, and to manufacture implements of war for *his* service. The daughters of Israel would be taken for confectioners and bakers for the royal household. To support his kingly state he would seize upon the best of their lands, bestowed upon the people by Jehovah Himself. The most valuable of their servants also, and of their cattle, he would take, and "put them to his work." Besides all this, the king would require a tenth of all their income, the profits of their labor, or the products of the soil. "Ye shall be his servants," concluded the prophet. "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." However burdensome its exactions should be found, when once a monarchy was established, they could not set it aside at pleasure.

But the people returned the answer, "Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

"Like all the nations." The Israelites did not realize that to be in this respect unlike other nations was a special privilege and blessing. God had separated the Israelites from every other people, to make them His own peculiar treasure. But they, disregarding this high honor, eagerly desired to imitate the example of the heathen! And still the longing to conform to worldly practices and customs exists among the professed people of God. As they depart from the Lord they become ambitious for the gains and honors of the world. Christians are constantly seeking to imitate the practices of those who worship the god of this world. Many urge that by uniting with worldlings and conforming to their customs they might exert a stronger influence over the ungodly. But all who pursue this course thereby separate from the Source of their strength. Becoming the friends of the world, they are the enemies of God. For the sake of earthly distinction they sacri-

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fice the unspeakable honor to which God has called them, of showing forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9.

With deep sadness Samuel listened to the words of the people; but the Lord said unto him, "Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king." The prophet had done his duty. He had faithfully presented the warning, and it had been rejected. With a heavy heart he dismissed the people, and himself departed to prepare for the great change in the government.

Samuel's life of purity and unselfish devotion was a perpetual rebuke both to self-serving priests and elders and to the proud, sensual congregation of Israel. Although he assumed no pomp and made no display, his labors bore the signet of Heaven. He was honored by the world's Redeemer, under whose guidance he ruled the Hebrew na-



tion. But the people had become weary of his piety and devotion; they despised his humble authority and rejected him for a man who should rule them as a king.

In the character of Samuel we see reflected the likeness of Christ. It was the purity of our Saviour's life that provoked the wrath of Satan. That life was the light of the world, and revealed the hidden depravity in the hearts of men. It was the holiness of Christ that stirred up against Him the fiercest passions of falsehearted professors of godliness. Christ came not with the wealth and honors of earth, yet the works which He wrought showed Him to possess power greater than that of any human prince. The Jews looked for the Messiah to break the oppressor's yoke, yet they cherished the sins that had bound it upon their necks. Had Christ cloaked their sins and applauded their piety, they would have accepted Him as their king; but they would not bear His fearless rebuke of their vices. The loveliness of a character in which benevolence, purity, and holiness reigned supreme, which entertained no hatred except for sin, they despised. Thus it has been in every age of the world. The light from heaven brings condemnation on all who refuse to walk in it. When rebuked by the example of those who hate sin, hypocrites will become agents of Satan to harass and persecute the faithful. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12.

Though a monarchical form of government for Israel had been foretold in prophecy, God had reserved to Himself the right to choose their king. The Hebrews so far respected the authority of God as to leave the selection entirely to Him. The choice fell upon Saul, a son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin.

The personal qualities of the future monarch were such as to gratify that pride of heart which prompted the desire for a king. "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he." 1 Samuel 9:2. Of noble and dignified bearing, in the prime of life, comely and tall, he appeared like one born to command. Yet with these external attractions, Saul was destitute of those higher qualities that constitute true wisdom. He had not in youth learned to control his rash, im-

petuous passions, he had never felt the renewing power of divine grace.

Saul was the son of a powerful and wealthy chief, yet in accordance with the simplicity of the times he was engaged with his father in the humble duties of a husbandman. Some of his father's animals having strayed upon the mountains, Saul went with a servant to seek for them. For three days they searched in vain, when, as they were not far from Ramah,* the home of Samuel, the servant proposed that they should inquire of the prophet concerning the missing property. "I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver," he said; "that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way." This was in accordance with the custom of the times. A person approaching a superior in rank or office made him a small present, as an expression of respect.

As they drew near to the city they met some young maidens who had come out to draw water, and inquired of them for the seer. In reply they were told that a religious service was about to take place; that the prophet had already arrived, there was to be an offering upon "the high place," and after that a sacrificial feast. A great change had taken place under Samuel's administration. When the call of God first came to him the services of the sanctuary were held in contempt. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord," 1 Samuel 2:17. But the worship of God was now maintained throughout the land, and the people manifested an interest in religious services. There being no ministration in the tabernacle, sacrifices were for the time offered elsewhere; and the cities of the priests and Levites, where the people resorted for instruction, were chosen for this purpose. The highest points in these cities were usually selected as the place of sacrifice, and hence were called "the high places."

At the gate of the city Saul was met by the prophet himself. God had revealed to Samuel that at that time the chosen king of Israel would present himself before him. As they now stood face to face, the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people."

* See Appendix, Note 9.

To the request of Saul, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is," Samuel replied, "I am the seer." Assuring him also that the lost animals had been found, he urged him to tarry and attend the feast, at the same time giving some intimation of the great destiny before him: "On whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?" The listener's heart thrilled at the prophet's words. He could not but perceive something of their significance, for the demand for a king had become a matter of absorbing interest to the whole nation. Yet with modest self-depreciation Saul replied, "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"

Samuel conducted the stranger to the place of assembly, where the principal men of the town were gathered. Among them, at the prophet's direction, the place of honor was given to Saul, and at the feast the choicest portion was set before him. The services over, Samuel took his guest to his own home, and there upon the housetop he communed with him, setting forth the great principles on which the government of Israel had been established, and thus seeking to prepare him, in some measure, for his high station.

When Saul departed, early next morning, the prophet went forth with him. Having passed through the town, he directed the servant to go forward. Then he bade Saul stand still to receive a message sent him from God. "Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because Jehovah hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?" As evidence that this was done by divine authority, he foretold the incidents that would occur on the homeward journey and assured Saul that he would be qualified by the Spirit of God for the station awaiting him. "The Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee," said the prophet, and thou "shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee."

As Saul went on his way, all came to pass as the prophet had said.

Near the border of Benjamin he was informed that the lost animals had been found. In the plain of Tabor he met three men who were going to worship God at Bethel. One of them carried three kids for sacrifice, another three loaves of bread, and the third a bottle of wine, for the sacrificial feast. They gave Saul the usual salutation and also presented him with two of the three loaves of bread. At Gibeah, his own city, a band of prophets returning from "the high place" were singing the praise of God to the music of the pipe and the harp, the psalter and the tabret. As Saul approached them the Spirit of the Lord came upon him also, and he joined in their song of praise, and prophesied with them. He spoke with so great fluency and wisdom, and joined so earnestly in the service, that those who had known him exclaimed in astonishment, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

As Saul united with the prophets in their worship, a great change was wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. The light of divine purity and holiness shone in upon the darkness of the natural heart. He saw himself as he was before God. He saw the beauty of holiness. He was now called to begin the warfare against sin and Satan, and he was made to feel that in this conflict his strength must come wholly from God. The plan of salvation, which had before seemed dim and uncertain, was opened to his understanding. The Lord endowed him with courage and wisdom for his high station. He revealed to him the Source of strength and grace, and enlightened his understanding as to the divine claims and his own duty.

The anointing of Saul as king had not been made known to the nation. The choice of God was to be publicly manifested by lot. For this purpose Samuel convoked the people at Mizpeh: Prayer was offered for divine guidance; then followed the solemn ceremony of casting the lot. In silence the assembled multitude awaited the issue. The tribe, the family, and the household were successively designated, and then Saul, the son of Kish, was pointed out as the individual chosen. But Saul was not in the assembly. Burdened with a sense of the great responsibility about to fall upon him, he had secretly with-



drawn. He was brought back to the congregation, who observed with pride and satisfaction that he was of kingly bearing and noble form, being "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." Even Samuel, when presenting him to the assembly, exclaimed, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" And in response arose from the vast throng one long, loud shout of joy, "God save the king!"

Samuel then set before the people "the manner of the kingdom," stating the principles upon which the monarchical government was based, and by which it should be controlled. The king was not to be an absolute monarch, but was to hold his power in subjection to the will of the Most High. This address was recorded in a book, wherein were set forth the prerogatives of the prince and the rights and privileges of the people. Though the nation had despised Samuel's warning, the faithful prophet, while forced to yield to their desires, still endeavored, as far as possible, to guard their liberties.

While the people in general were ready to acknowledge Saul as their king, there was a large party in opposition. For a monarch to be chosen from Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel—and that to the neglect of both Judah and Ephraim, the largest and most powerful—was a slight which they could not brook. They refused to profess allegiance to Saul or to bring him the customary presents. Those who had been most urgent in their demand for a king were the very ones that refused to accept with gratitude the man of God's appointment. The members of each faction had their favorite, whom they wished to see placed on the throne, and several among the leaders had desired the honor for themselves. Envy and jealousy burned in the hearts of many. The efforts of pride and ambition had resulted in disappointment and discontent.

In this condition of affairs Saul did not see fit to assume the royal dignity. Leaving Samuel to administer the government as formerly, he returned to Gibeah. He was honorably escorted thither by a company, who, seeing the divine choice in his selection, were determined to sustain him. But he made no attempt to maintain by force his right

to the throne. In his home among the uplands of Benjamin he quietly occupied himself in the duties of a husbandman, leaving the establishment of his authority entirely to God.

Soon after Saul's appointment the Ammonites, under their king, Nahash, invaded the territory of the tribes east of Jordan and threatened the city of Jabesh-gilead. The inhabitants tried to secure terms of peace by offering to become tributary to the Ammonites. To this the cruel king would not consent but on condition that he might put out the right eye of every one of them, thus making them abiding witnesses to his power.

The people of the besieged city begged a respite of seven days. To this the Ammonites consented, thinking thus to heighten the honor of their expected triumph. Messengers were at once dispatched from Jabesh, to seek help from the tribes west of Jordan. They carried the tidings to Gibeah, creating widespread terror. Saul, returning at night from following the oxen in the field, heard the loud wail that told of some great calamity. He said, "What aileth the people that they weep?" When the shameful story was repeated, all his dormant powers were roused. "The Spirit of God came upon Saul. . . . And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen."

Three hundred and thirty thousand men gathered on the plain of Bezek, under the command of Saul. Messengers were immediately sent to the besieged city with the assurance that they might expect help on the morrow, the very day on which they were to submit to the Ammonites. By a rapid night march Saul and his army crossed the Jordan and arrived before Jabesh in "the morning watch." Like Gideon, dividing his force into three companies, he fell upon the Ammonite camp at that early hour, when, not suspecting danger, they were least secure. In the panic that followed they were routed with great slaughter. And "they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."

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The promptness and bravery of Saul, as well as the generalship shown in the successful conduct of so large a force, were qualities which the people of Israel had desired in a monarch, that they might be able to cope with other nations. They now greeted him as their king, attributing the honor of the victory to human agencies and forgetting that without God's special blessing all their efforts would have been in vain. In their enthusiasm some proposed to put to death those who had at first refused to acknowledge the authority of Saul. But the king interfered, saying, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." Here Saul gave evidence of the change that had taken place in his character. Instead of taking honor to himself, he gave the glory to God. Instead of showing a desire for revenge, he manifested a spirit of compassion and forgiveness. This is unmistakable evidence that the grace of God dwells in the heart.

Samuel now proposed that a national assembly should be convoked at Gilgal, that the kingdom might there be publicly confirmed to Saul. It was done; "and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

Gilgal had been the place of Israel's first encampment in the Prom-



ised Land. It was here that Joshua, by divine direction, set up the pillar of twelve stones to commemorate the miraculous passage of the Jordan. Here circumcision had been renewed. Here they had kept the first Pass-over after the sin at Kadesh and the desert sojourn. Here the manna ceased. Here the Captain of the Lord's host had revealed Himself as chief in command of the armies of Israel. From this place they marched to the overthrow of Jericho and the conquest of Ai. Here Achan met the penalty of his sin, and here was made that treaty with the Gibeonites which punished Israel's neglect to ask counsel of God. Upon this plain, linked with so many thrilling associations, stood Samuel and Saul; and when the shouts of welcome to the king had died away, the aged prophet gave his parting words as ruler of the nation.

"Behold," he said, "I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; . . . and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you."

With one voice the people answered, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand."

Samuel was not seeking merely to justify his own course. He had previously set forth the principles that should govern both the king and the people, and he desired to add to his words the weight of his own example. From childhood he had been connected with the work of God, and during his long life one object had been ever before him—the glory of God and the highest good of Israel.

Before there could be any hope of prosperity for Israel they must be led to repentance before God. In consequence of sin they had lost their faith in God and their discernment of His power and wisdom to rule the nation—lost their confidence in His ability to vindicate His cause. Before they could find true peace they must be led to see and confess the very sin of which they had been guilty. They had declared the object

of the demand for a king to be, "That our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." Samuel recounted the history of Israel, from the day when God brought them from Egypt. Jehovah, the King of kings, had gone out before them and had fought their battles. Often their sins had sold them into the power of their enemies, but no sooner did they turn from their evil ways than God's mercy raised up a deliverer. The Lord sent Gideon and Barak, and "Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelt safe." Yet when threatened with danger they had declared, "A king shall reign over us," when, said the prophet, "Jehovah your God was your King."

"Now therefore," continued Samuel, "stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day." At the time of wheat harvest, in May and June, no rain fell in the East. The sky was cloudless, and the air serene and mild. So violent a storm at this season filled all hearts with fear. In humiliation the people now confessed their sin—the very sin of which they had been guilty: "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king."

Samuel did not leave the people in a state of discouragement, for this would have prevented all effort for a better life. Satan would lead them to look upon God as severe and unforgiving, and they would thus be exposed to manifold temptations. God is merciful and forgiving, ever desiring to show favor to His people when they will obey His voice. "Fear not," was the message of God by His servant: "ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake His people."

Samuel said nothing of the slight which had been put upon him-

self; he uttered no reproach for the ingratitude with which Israel had repaid his lifelong devotion; but he assured them of his unceasing interest for them: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."



chapter 60

The Presumption of Saul

AFTER the assembly at Gilgal, Saul disbanded the army that had at his call arisen to overthrow the Ammonites, reserving only two thousand men to be stationed under his command at Michmash and one thousand to attend his son Jonathan at Gibeah. Here was a serious error. His army was filled with hope and courage by the recent victory; and had he proceeded at once against other enemies of Israel, a telling blow might have been struck for the liberties of the nation.

Meanwhile their warlike neighbors, the Philistines, were active. After the defeat at Ebenezer they had still retained possession of some hill fortresses in the land of Israel, and now they established themselves in the very heart of the country. In facilities, arms, and equipments the Philistines had great advantage over Israel. During the long period of their oppressive rule they had endeavored to strengthen their power by forbidding the Israelites to practice the trade of smiths, lest they should make weapons of war. After the conclusion of peace the Hebrews had still resorted to the Philistine garrisons for such work as needed to be done. Controlled by love of ease and the abject spirit induced by long oppression, the men of Israel had, to a great extent, neglected to provide themselves with weapons of war. Bows and slings were used in warfare, and these the Israelites could obtain; but there

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 13; 14.

Jonathan and his armor-bearer,
inspired by faith, climbed the
cliff and routed the Philistines.

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were none among them, except Saul and his son Jonathan, who possessed a spear or a sword.

It was not until the second year of Saul's reign that an attempt was made to subdue the Philistines. The first blow was struck by Jonathan, the king's son, who attacked and overcame their garrison at Geba. The Philistines, exasperated by this defeat, made ready for a speedy attack upon Israel. Saul now caused war to be proclaimed by the sound of the trumpet throughout the land, calling upon all the men of war, including the tribes across the Jordan, to assemble at Gilgal. This summons was obeyed.

The Philistines had gathered an immense force at Michmash—"thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude." When the tidings reached Saul and his army at Gilgal, the people were appalled at thought of the mighty forces they would have to encounter in battle. They were not prepared to meet the enemy, and many were so terrified that they dared not come to the test of an encounter. Some crossed the Jordan, while others hid themselves in caves and pits and amid the rocks that abounded in that region. As the time for the encounter drew near, the number of desertions rapidly increased, and those who did not withdraw from the ranks were filled with foreboding and terror.

When Saul was first anointed king of Israel, he had received from Samuel explicit directions concerning the course to be pursued at this time. "Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal," said the prophet; "and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do." 1 Samuel 10:8.

Day after day Saul tarried, but without making decided efforts toward encouraging the people and inspiring confidence in God. Before the time appointed by the prophet had fully expired, he became impatient at the delay and allowed himself to be discouraged by the trying circumstances that surrounded him. Instead of faithfully seeking to prepare the people for the service that Samuel was coming to

perform, he indulged in unbelief and foreboding. The work of seeking God by sacrifice was a most solemn and important work; and God required that His people should search their hearts and repent of their sins, that the offering might be made with acceptance before Him, and that His blessing might attend their efforts to conquer the enemy. But Saul had grown restless; and the people, instead of trusting in God for help, were looking to the king whom they had chosen, to lead and direct them.

Yet the Lord still cared for them and did not give them up to the disasters that would have come upon them if the frail arm of flesh had become their only support. He brought them into close places, that they might be convicted of the folly of depending on man, and that they might turn to Him as their only help. The time for the proving of Saul had come. He was now to show whether or not he would depend on God and patiently wait according to His command, thus revealing himself as one whom God could trust in trying places as the ruler of His people, or whether he would be vacillating and unworthy of the sacred responsibility that had devolved upon him. Would the king whom Israel had chosen, listen to the Ruler of all kings? Would he turn the attention of his fainthearted soldiers to the One in whom is everlasting strength and deliverance?

With growing impatience he awaited the arrival of Samuel and attributed the confusion and distress and desertion of his army to the absence of the prophet. The appointed time came, but the man of God did not immediately appear. God's providence had detained His servant. But Saul's restless, impulsive spirit would no longer be restrained. Feeling that something must be done to calm the fears of the people, he determined to summon an assembly for religious service, and by sacrifice entreat the divine aid. God had directed that only those consecrated to the office should present sacrifices before Him. But Saul commanded, "Bring hither a burnt offering;" and, equipped as he was with armor and weapons of war, he approached the altar and offered sacrifice before God.

"And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offer-

ing the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him." Samuel saw at once that Saul had gone contrary to the express directions that had been given him. The Lord had spoken by His prophet that at this time He would reveal what Israel must do in this crisis. If Saul had fulfilled the conditions upon which divine help was promised, the Lord would have wrought a marvelous deliverance for Israel, with the few who were loyal to the king. But Saul was so well satisfied with himself and his work that he went out to meet the prophet as one who should be commended rather than disapproved.

Samuel's countenance was full of anxiety and trouble; but to his inquiry, "What hast thou done?" Saul offered excuses for his presumptuous act. He said: "I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

"And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people. . . . And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin."

Either Israel must cease to be the people of God, or the principle upon which the monarchy was founded must be maintained, and the nation must be governed by a divine power. If Israel would be wholly the Lord's, if the will of the human and earthly were held in subjection to the will of God, He would continue to be the Ruler of Israel. So long as the king and the people would conduct themselves as subordinate to God, so long He could be their defense. But in Israel no monarchy could prosper that did not in all things acknowledge the supreme authority of God.

If Saul had shown a regard for the requirements of God in this time of trial, God could have worked His will through him. His failure now proved him unfit to be the vicegerent of God to His people. He would mislead Israel. His will, rather than the will of God, would be the controlling power. If Saul had been faithful, his kingdom would have been established forever; but since he had failed, the purpose of God must be accomplished by another. The government of Israel must be committed to one who would rule the people according to the will of Heaven.

We do not know what great interests may be at stake in the proving of God. There is no safety except in strict obedience to the Word of God. All His promises are made upon condition of faith and obedience, and a failure to comply with His commands cuts off the fulfillment to us of the rich provisions of the Scriptures. We should not follow impulse, nor rely on the judgment of men; we should look to the revealed will of God and walk according to His definite commandment, no matter what circumstances may surround us. God will take care of the results; by faithfulness to His Word we may in time of trial prove before men and angels that the Lord can trust us in difficult places to carry out His will, honor His name, and bless His people.

Saul was in disfavor with God, and yet unwilling to humble his heart in penitence. What he lacked in real piety he would try to make up by his zeal in the forms of religion. Saul was not ignorant of Israel's defeat when the ark of God was brought into the camp by Hophni and Phinehas; and yet, knowing all this, he determined to send for the sacred chest and its attendant priest. Could he by this means inspire confidence in the people, he hoped to reassemble his scattered army and give battle to the Philistines. He would now dispense with Samuel's presence and support, thus free himself from the prophet's unwelcome criticisms and reproofs.

The Holy Spirit had been granted to Saul to enlighten his understanding and soften his heart. He had received faithful instruction and reproof from the prophet of God. And yet how great was his perversity! The history of Israel's first king presents a sad example of the

power of early wrong habits. In his youth Saul did not love and fear God; and that impetuous spirit, not early trained to submission, was ever ready to rebel against divine authority. Those who in their youth cherish a sacred regard for the will of God, and who faithfully perform the duties of their position, will be prepared for higher service in afterlife. But men cannot for years pervert the powers that God has given them, and then, when they choose to change, find these powers fresh and free for an entirely opposite course.

Saul's efforts to arouse the people proved unavailing. Finding his force reduced to six hundred men, he left Gilgal and retired to the fortress at Geba, lately taken from the Philistines. This stronghold was on the south side of a deep, rugged valley, or gorge, a few miles north of the site of Jerusalem. On the north side of the same valley, at Michmash, the Philistine force lay encamped while detachments of troops went out in different directions to ravage the country.

God had permitted matters to be thus brought to a crisis that He might rebuke the perversity of Saul and teach His people a lesson of humility and faith. Because of Saul's sin in his presumptuous offering, the Lord would not give him the honor of vanquishing the Philistines. Jonathan, the king's son, a man who feared the Lord, was chosen as the instrument to deliver Israel. Moved by a divine impulse, he proposed to his armor-bearer that they should make a secret attack upon the enemy's camp. "It may be," he urged, "that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

The armor-bearer, who also was a man of faith and prayer, encouraged the design, and together they withdrew from the camp, secretly, lest their purpose should be opposed. With earnest prayer to the Guide of their fathers, they agreed upon a sign by which they might determine how to proceed. Then passing down into the gorge separating the two armies, they silently threaded their way, under the shadow of the cliff, and partially concealed by the mounds and ridges of the valley. Approaching the Philistine fortress, they were revealed to the view of their enemies, who said, tauntingly, "Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves," then chal-

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lenged them, "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing," meaning that they would punish the two Israelites for their daring. This challenge was the token that Jonathan and his companion had agreed to accept as evidence that the Lord would prosper their undertaking. Passing now from the sight of the Philistines, and choosing a secret and difficult path, the warriors made their way to the summit of a cliff that had been deemed inaccessible, and was not very strongly guarded. Thus they penetrated the enemy's camp and slew the sentinels, who, overcome with surprise and fear, offered no resistance.

Angels of heaven shielded Jonathan and his attendant, angels fought by their side, and the Philistines fell before them. The earth trembled as though a great multitude with horsemen and chariots were approaching. Jonathan recognized the tokens of divine aid, and even the Philistines knew that God was working for the deliverance of Israel. Great fear seized upon the host, both in the field and in the garrison. In the confusion, mistaking their own soldiers for enemies, the Philistines began to slay one another.

Soon the noise of the battle was heard in the camp of Israel. The king's sentinals reported that there was great confusion among the Philistines, and that their numbers were decreasing. Yet it was not



known that any part of the Hebrew army had left the camp. Upon inquiry it was found that none were absent except Jonathan and his armor-bearer. But seeing that the Philistines were meeting with a repulse, Saul led his army to join the assault. The Hebrews who had deserted to the enemy now turned against them; great numbers also came out of their hiding places, and as the Philistines fled, discomfited, Saul's army committed terrible havoc upon the fugitives.

Determined to make the most of his advantage, the king rashly forbade his soldiers to partake of food for the entire day, enforcing his command by the solemn imprecation, "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies." The victory had already been gained, without Saul's knowledge or co-operation, but he hoped to distinguish himself by the utter destruction of the vanquished army. The command to refrain from food was prompted by selfish ambition, and it showed the king to be indifferent to the needs of his people when these conflicted with his desire for self-exaltation. To confirm his prohibition by a solemn oath showed Saul to be both rash and profane. The very words of the curse give evidence that Saul's zeal was for himself, and not for the honor of God. He declared his object to be, not "that the Lord may be avenged on *His* enemies," but "that *I* may be avenged on *mine* enemies."

The prohibition resulted in leading the people to transgress the command of God. They had been engaged in warfare all day, and were faint for want of food; and as soon as the hours of restriction were over, they fell upon the spoil and devoured the flesh with the blood, thus violating the law that forbade the eating of blood.

During the day's battle Jonathan, who had not heard of the king's command, unwittingly offended by eating a little honey as he passed through a wood. Saul learned of this at evening. He had declared that the violation of his edict should be punished with death; and though Jonathan had not been guilty of a willful sin, though God had miraculously preserved his life and had wrought deliverance through him, the king declared that the sentence must be executed. To spare the life of his son would have been an acknowledgment on the part

of Saul that he had sinned in making so rash a vow. This would have been humiliating to his pride. "God do so, and more also," was his terrible sentence: "thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."

Saul could not claim the honor of the victory, but he hoped to be honored for his zeal in maintaining the sacredness of his oath. Even at the sacrifice of his son, he would impress upon his subjects the fact that the royal authority must be maintained. At Gilgal, but a short time before, Saul had presumed to officiate as priest, contrary to the command of God. When reproved by Samuel, he had stubbornly justified himself. Now, when his own command was disobeyed—though the command was unreasonable and had been violated through ignorance—the king and father sentenced his son to death.

The people refused to allow the sentence to be executed. Braving the anger of the king, they declared, "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day." The proud monarch dared not disregard this unanimous verdict, and the life of Jonathan was preserved.

Saul could not but feel that his son was preferred before him, both by the people and by the Lord. Jonathan's deliverance was a severe reproof to the king's rashness. He felt a presentiment that his curses would return upon his own head. He did not longer continue the war with the Philistines, but returned to his home, moody and dissatisfied.

Those who are most ready to excuse or justify themselves in sin are often most severe in judging and condemning others. Many, like Saul, bring upon themselves the displeasure of God, but they reject counsel and despise reproof. Even when convinced that the Lord is not with them, they refuse to see in themselves the cause of their trouble. They cherish a proud, boastful spirit, while they indulge in cruel judgment or severe rebuke of others who are better than they. Well would it be for such self-constituted judges to ponder those words of Christ: "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:2.

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Often those who are seeking to exalt themselves are brought into positions where their true character is revealed. So it was in the case of Saul. His own course convinced the people that kingly honor and authority were dearer to him than justice, mercy, or benevolence. Thus the people were led to see their error in rejecting the government that God had given them. They had exchanged the pious prophet, whose prayers had brought down blessings, for a king who in his blind zeal had prayed for a curse upon them.

Had not the men of Israel interposed to save the life of Jonathan, their deliverer would have perished by the king's decree. With what misgivings must that people afterward have followed Saul's guidance! How bitter the thought that he had been placed upon the throne by their own act! The Lord bears long with the waywardness of men, and to all He grants opportunity to see and forsake their sins; but while He may seem to prosper those who disregard His will and despise His warnings, He will, in His own time, surely make manifest their folly.

chapter 61

Saul Rejected

SAUL had failed to bear the test of faith in the trying situation at Gilgal, and had brought dishonor upon the service of God; but his errors were not yet irretrievable, and the Lord would grant him another opportunity to learn the lesson of unquestioning faith in His Word and obedience to His commands.

When reproved by the prophet at Gilgal, Saul saw no great sin in the course he had pursued. He felt that he had been treated unjustly, and endeavored to vindicate his actions and offered excuses for his error. From that time he had little intercourse with the prophet. Samuel loved Saul as his own son, while Saul, bold and ardent in temper, had held the prophet in high regard; but he resented Samuel's rebuke, and thenceforth avoided him so far as possible.

But the Lord sent His servant with another message to Saul. By obedience he might still prove his fidelity to God and his worthiness to walk before Israel. Samuel came to the king and delivered the word of the Lord. That the monarch might realize the importance of heeding the command, Samuel expressly declared that he spoke by divine direction, by the same authority that had called Saul to the throne. The prophet said, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 15.

woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." The Amalekites had been the first to make war upon Israel in the wilderness; and for this sin, together with their defiance of God and their debasing idolatry, the Lord, through Moses, had pronounced sentence upon them. By divine direction the history of their cruelty toward Israel had been recorded, with the command, "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it." Deuteronomy 25:19. For four hundred years the execution of this sentence had been deferred; but the Amalekites had not turned from their sins. The Lord knew that this wicked people would, if it were possible, blot out His people and His worship from the earth. Now the time had come for the sentence, so long delayed, to be executed.

The forbearance that God has exercised toward the wicked, emboldens men in transgression; but their punishment will be none the less certain and terrible for being long delayed. "The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act." Isaiah 28:21. To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Yet He will "by no means clear the guilty." Exodus 34:6, 7. While He does not delight in vengeance, He will execute judgment upon the transgressors of His law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some He must cut off those who have become hardened in sin. "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." Nahum 1:3. By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. And the very fact of His reluctance to execute justice testifies to the enormity of the sins that call forth His judgments and to the severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor.

But while inflicting judgment, God remembered mercy. The Ama-

lekites were to be destroyed, but the Kenites, who dwelt among them, were spared. This people, though not wholly free from idolatry, were worshipers of God and were friendly to Israel. Of this tribe was the brother-in-law of Moses, Hobab, who had accompanied the Israelites in their travels through the wilderness, and by his knowledge of the country had rendered them valuable assistance.

Since the defeat of the Philistines at Michmash, Saul had made war against Moab, Ammon, and Edom, and against the Amalekites and the Philistines; and wherever he turned his arms, he gained fresh victories. On receiving the commission against the Amalekites, he at once proclaimed war. To his own authority was added that of the prophet, and at the call to battle the men of Israel flocked to his standard. The expedition was not to be entered upon for the purpose of self-aggrandizement; the Israelites were not to receive either the honor of the conquest or the spoils of their enemies. They were to engage in the war solely as an act of obedience to God, for the purpose of executing His judgment upon the Amalekites. God intended that all nations should behold the doom of that people that had defied His sovereignty, and should mark that they were destroyed by the very people whom they had despised.

"Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly."

This victory over the Amalekites was the most brilliant victory that Saul had ever gained, and it served to rekindle the pride of heart that was his greatest peril. The divine edict devoting the enemies of God to utter destruction was but partially fulfilled. Ambitious to heighten the honor of his triumphal return by the presence of a royal captive, Saul ventured to imitate the customs of the nations around him and spared Agag, the fierce and war-like king of the Amalekites. The

people reserved for themselves the finest of the flocks, herds, and beasts of burden, excusing their sin on the ground that the cattle were reserved to be offered as sacrifices to the Lord. It was their purpose, however, to use these merely as a substitute, to save their own cattle.

Saul had now been subjected to the final test. His presumptuous disregard of the will of God, showing his determination to rule as an independent monarch, proved that he could not be trusted with royal power as the vicegerent of the Lord. While Saul and his army were marching home in the flush of victory, there was deep anguish in the home of Samuel the prophet. He had received a message from the Lord denouncing the course of the king: "It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments." The prophet was deeply grieved over the course of the rebellious king, and he wept and prayed all night for a reversing of the terrible sentence.

God's repentance is not like man's repentance. "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent." Man's repentance implies a change of mind. God's repentance implies a change of circumstances and relations. Man may change his relation to God by complying with the conditions upon which he may be brought into the divine favor, or he may, by his own action, place himself outside the favoring condition; but the Lord is the same "yesterday, and today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8. Saul's disobedience changed his relation to God; but the conditions of acceptance with God were unaltered—God's requirements were still the same, for with Him there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.

With an aching heart the prophet set forth the next morning to meet the erring king. Samuel cherished a hope that, upon reflection, Saul might become conscious of his sin, and by repentance and humiliation be again restored to the divine favor. But when the first step is taken in the path of transgression the way becomes easy. Saul, debased by his disobedience, came to meet Samuel with a lie upon his lips. He



exclaimed, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

The sounds that fell on the prophet's ears disproved the statement of the disobedient king. To the pointed question, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul made answer, "They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." The people had obeyed Saul's directions; but in order to shield himself, he was willing to charge upon them the sin of his disobedience.

The message of Saul's rejection brought unspeakable grief to the heart of Samuel. It had to be delivered before the whole army of Israel, when they were filled with pride and triumphal rejoicing over a victory that was accredited to the valor and generalship of their king, for Saul had not associated God with the success of Israel in this conflict; but when the prophet saw the evidence of Saul's rebellion, he was stirred with indignation that he, who had been so highly favored of God, should transgress the commandment of Heaven and lead Israel into sin. Samuel was not deceived by the subterfuge of the king. With mingled grief and indignation he declared, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. . . . When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?" He repeated the command of the Lord concerning Amalek, and demanded the reason of the king's disobedience.

Saul persisted in self-justification: "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal."

In stern and solemn words the prophet swept away the refuge of lies and pronounced the irrevocable sentence: "Hath the Lord as great

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delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king."

As the king heard this fearful sentence he cried out, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." Terrified by the denunciation of the prophet, Saul acknowledged his guilt, which he had before stubbornly denied; but he still persisted in casting blame upon the people, declaring that he had sinned through fear of them.

It was not sorrow for sin, but fear of its penalty, that actuated the king of Israel as he entreated Samuel, "I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord." If Saul had had true repentance, he would have made public confession of his sin; but it was his chief anxiety to maintain his authority and retain the allegiance of the people. He desired the honor of Samuel's presence in order to strengthen his own influence with the nation.

"I will not return with thee," was the answer of the prophet: "for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to depart, the king, in an agony of fear, laid hold of his mantle to hold him back, but it rent in his hands. Upon this, the prophet declared, "The Lord



hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou."

Saul was more disturbed by the alienation of Samuel than by the displeasure of God. He knew that the people had greater confidence in the prophet than in himself. Should another by divine command be now anointed king, Saul felt that it would be impossible to maintain his own authority. He feared an immediate revolt should Samuel utterly forsake him. Saul entreated the prophet to honor him before the elders and the people by publicly uniting with him in a religious service. By divine direction Samuel yielded to the king's request, that no occasion might be given for a revolt. But he remained only as a silent witness of the service.

An act of justice, stern and terrible, was yet to be performed. Samuel must publicly vindicate the honor of God and rebuke the course of Saul. He commanded that the king of the Amalekites be brought before him. Above all who had fallen by the sword of Israel, Agag was the most guilty and merciless; one who had hated and sought to destroy the people of God, and whose influence had been strongest to promote idolatry. He came at the prophet's command, flattering himself that the danger of death was past. Samuel declared: "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord." This done, Samuel returned to his home at Ramah, Saul to his at Gibeah. Only once thereafter did the prophet and the king ever meet each other.

When called to the throne, Saul had a humble opinion of his own capabilities, and was willing to be instructed. He was deficient in knowledge and experience and had serious defects of character. But the Lord granted him the Holy Spirit as a guide and helper, and placed him in a position where he could develop the qualities requisite for a ruler of Israel. Had he remained humble, seeking constantly to be guided by divine wisdom, he would have been enabled to discharge the duties of his high position with success and honor. Under the influence of divine grace every good quality would have been gaining

strength, while evil tendencies would have lost their power. This is the work which the Lord proposes to do for all who consecrate themselves to Him. There are many whom He has called to positions in His work because they have a humble and teachable spirit. In His providence He places them where they may learn of Him. He will reveal to them their defects of character, and to all who seek His aid He will give strength to correct their errors.

But Saul presumed upon his exaltation, and dishonored God by unbelief and disobedience. Though when first called to the throne he was humble and self-distrustful, success made him self-confident. The very first victory of his reign had kindled that pride of heart which was his greatest danger. The valor and military skill displayed in the deliverance of Jabesh-gilead had roused the enthusiasm of the whole nation. The people honored their king, forgetting that he was but the agent by whom God had wrought; and though at first Saul ascribed the glory to God, he afterward took honor to himself. He lost sight of his dependence upon God, and in heart departed from the Lord. Thus the way was prepared for his sin of presumption and sacrilege at Gilgal. The same blind self-confidence led him to reject Samuel's reproof. Saul acknowledged Samuel to be a prophet sent from God; hence he should have accepted the reproof, though he could not himself see that he had sinned. Had he been willing to see and confess his error, this bitter experience would have proved a safeguard for the future.

If the Lord had then separated Himself entirely from Saul, He would not have again spoken to him through His prophet, entrusting him with a definite work to perform, that he might correct the errors of the past. When one who professes to be a child of God becomes careless in doing His will, thereby influencing others to be irreverent and unmindful of the Lord's injunctions, it is still possible for his failures to be turned into victories if he will but accept reproof with true contrition of soul and return to God in humility and faith. The humiliation of defeat often proves a blessing by showing us our inability to do the will of God without His aid.

When Saul turned away from the reproof sent him by God's Holy Spirit, and persisted in his stubborn self-justification, he rejected the only means by which God could work to save him from himself. He had willfully separated himself from God. He could not receive divine help or guidance until he should return to God by confession of his sin.

At Gilgal, Saul had made an appearance of great conscientiousness, as he stood before the army of Israel offering up a sacrifice to God. But his piety was not genuine. A religious service performed in direct opposition to the command of God only served to weaken Saul's hands, placing him beyond the help that God was so willing to grant him.

In his expedition against Amalek, Saul thought he had done all that was essential of that which the Lord had commanded him; but the Lord was not pleased with partial obedience, nor willing to pass over what had been neglected through so plausible a motive. God has given men no liberty to depart from His requirements. The Lord had declared to Israel, "Ye shall not do . . . every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes;" but ye shall "observe and hear all these words which I command thee." Deuteronomy 12:8, 28. In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12.

"To obey is better than sacrifice." The sacrificial offerings were in themselves of no value in the sight of God. They were designed to express on the part of the offerer penitence for sin and faith in Christ and to pledge future obedience to the law of God. But without penitence, faith, and an obedient heart, the offerings were worthless. When, in direct violation of God's command, Saul proposed to present a sacrifice of that which God had devoted to destruction, open contempt was shown for the divine authority. The service would have been an insult to Heaven. Yet with the sin of Saul and its result before us, how many are pursuing a similar course. While they refuse to be-

lieve and obey some requirement of the Lord, they persevere in offering up to God their formal services of religion. There is no response of the Spirit of God to such service. No matter how zealous men may be in their observance of religious ceremonies, the Lord cannot accept them if they persist in willful violation of one of His commands.

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Rebellion originated with Satan, and all rebellion against God is directly due to satanic influence. Those who set themselves against the government of God have entered into an alliance with the archapostate, and he will exercise his power and cunning to captivate the senses and mislead the understanding. He will cause everything to appear in a false light. Like our first parents, those who are under his bewitching spell see only the great benefits to be received by transgression.

No stronger evidence can be given of Satan's delusive power than that many who are thus led by him deceive themselves with the belief that they are in the service of God. When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the authority of Moses, they thought they were opposing only a human leader, a man like themselves; and they came to believe that they were verily doing God service. But in rejecting God's chosen instrument they rejected Christ; they insulted the Spirit of God. So, in the days of Christ, the Jewish scribes and elders, who professed great zeal for the honor of God, crucified His Son. The same spirit still exists in the hearts of those who set themselves to follow their own will in opposition to the will of God.

Saul had had the most ample proof that Samuel was divinely inspired. His venturing to disregard the command of God through the prophet was against the dictates of reason and sound judgment. His fatal presumption must be attributed to satanic sorcery. Saul had manifested great zeal in suppressing idolatry and witchcraft; yet in his disobedience to the divine command he had been actuated by the same spirit of opposition to God and had been as really inspired by Satan as are those who practice sorcery; and when reproved, he had added stubbornness to rebellion. He could have offered no greater

insult to the Spirit of God had he openly united with idolaters.

It is a perilous step to slight the reproofs and warnings of God's Word or of His Spirit. Many, like Saul, yield to temptation until they become blind to the true character of sin. They flatter themselves that they have had some good object in view, and have done no wrong in departing from the Lord's requirements. Thus they do despite to the Spirit of grace, until its voice is no longer heard, and they are left to the delusions which they have chosen.

In Saul, God had given to Israel a king after their own heart, as Samuel said when the kingdom was confirmed to Saul at Gilgal, "*Behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired.*" 1 Samuel 12:13. Comely in person, of noble stature and princely bearing, his appearance accorded with their conceptions of royal dignity; and his personal valor and his ability in the conduct of armies were the qualities which they regarded as best calculated to secure respect and honor from other nations. They felt little solicitude that their king should possess those higher qualities which alone could fit him to rule with justice and equity. They did not ask for one who had true nobility of character, who possessed the love and fear of God. They had not sought counsel from God as to the qualities a ruler should possess, in order to preserve their distinctive, holy character as His chosen people. They were not seeking God's way, but their own way. Therefore God gave them such a king as they desired—one whose character was a reflection of their own. Their hearts were not in submission to God, and their king also was unsubdued by divine grace. Under the rule of this king they would obtain the experience necessary in order that they might see their error, and return to their allegiance to God.

Yet the Lord, having placed on Saul the responsibility of the kingdom, did not leave him to himself. He caused the Holy Spirit to rest upon Saul to reveal to him his own weakness and his need of divine grace; and had Saul relied upon God, God would have been with him. So long as his will was controlled by the will of God, so long as he yielded to the discipline of His Spirit, God could crown his efforts

with success. But when Saul chose to act independently of God, the Lord could no longer be his guide, and was forced to set him aside. Then He called to the throne “a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14)—not one who was faultless in character, but who, instead of trusting to himself, would rely upon God, and be guided by His Spirit; who, when he sinned, would submit to reproof and correction.



chapter 62

The Anointing of David

A FEW miles south of Jerusalem, “the city of the great King,” is Bethlehem, where David, the son of Jesse, was born more than a thousand years before the infant Jesus was cradled in the manger and worshiped by the Wise Men from the East. Centuries before the advent of the Saviour, David, in the freshness of boyhood, kept watch of his flocks as they grazed on the hills surrounding Bethlehem. The simple shepherd boy sang the songs of his own composing, and the music of his harp made a sweet accompaniment to the melody of his fresh young voice. The Lord had chosen David, and was preparing him, in his solitary life with his flocks, for the work He designed to commit to his trust in after years.

While David was thus living in the retirement of his humble shepherd's life, the Lord God was speaking about him to the prophet Samuel. “And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. . . . Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

While as a youth David cared for his father's flocks, the Lord was preparing him for future service.

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that which the Lord spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably." The elders accepted an invitation to the sacrifice, and Samuel called also Jesse and his sons. The altar was built and the sacrifice was ready. All the household of Jesse were present, with the exception of David, the youngest son, who had been left to guard the sheep, for it was not safe to leave the flocks unprotected.

When the sacrifice was ended, and before partaking of the offering feast, Samuel began his prophetic inspection of the noble-appearing sons of Jesse. Eliab was the eldest, and more nearly resembled Saul for stature and beauty than the others. His comely features and finely developed form attracted the attention of the prophet. As Samuel looked upon his princely bearing, he thought, "This is indeed the man whom God has chosen as successor to Saul," and he waited for the divine sanction that he might anoint him. But Jehovah did not look upon the outward appearance. Eliab did not fear the Lord. Had he been called to the throne, he would have been a proud, exacting ruler. The Lord's word to Samuel was, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." No outward beauty can recommend the soul to God. The wisdom and excellence revealed in the character and deportment, express the true beauty of the man; and it is the inner worth, the excellency of the heart, that determines our acceptance with the Lord of hosts. How deeply should we feel this truth in the judgment of ourselves and others. We may learn from the mistake of Samuel how vain is the estimation that rests on beauty of face or nobility of stature. We may see how incapable is man's wisdom of understanding the secrets of the heart or of comprehending the counsels of God without special enlightenment from heaven. The thoughts and ways of God in relation to His creatures are above our finite minds; but we may be assured that His children will be brought to fill the very place for which they are qualified, and will be enabled to accomplish the very work committed to their hands, if they will

but submit their will to God, that His beneficent plans may not be frustrated by the perversity of man.

Eliab passed from the inspection of Samuel, and the six brothers who were in attendance at the service followed in succession to be observed by the prophet; but the Lord did not signify His choice of any one of them. With painful suspense Samuel had looked upon the last of the young men; the prophet was perplexed and bewildered. He inquired of Jesse, "Are here all thy children?" The father answered, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep." Samuel directed that he should be summoned, saying, "We will not sit down till he come hither."

The lonely shepherd was startled by the unexpected call of the messenger, who announced that the prophet had come to Bethlehem and had sent for him. With surprise he questioned why the prophet and judge of Israel should desire to see him; but without delay he obeyed the call. "Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." As Samuel beheld with pleasure the handsome, manly, modest shepherd boy, the voice of the Lord spoke to the prophet, saying, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he." David had proved himself brave and faithful in the humble office of a shepherd, and now God had chosen him to be captain of His people. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of [from among] his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." The prophet had accomplished his appointed work, and with a relieved heart he returned to Ramah.

Samuel had not made known his errand, even to the family of Jesse, and the ceremony of anointing David had been performed in secret. It was an intimation to the youth of the high destiny awaiting him, that amid all the varied experiences and peril of his coming years, this knowledge might inspire him to be true to the purpose of God to be accomplished by his life.

The great honor conferred upon David did not serve to elate him. Notwithstanding the high position which he was to occupy, he quietly continued his employment, content to await the development of the

Lord's plans in His own time and way. As humble and modest as before his anointing, the shepherd boy returned to the hills and watched and guarded his flocks as tenderly as ever. But with new inspiration he composed his melodies and played upon his harp. Before him spread a landscape of rich and varied beauty. The vines, with their clustering fruit, brightened in the sunshine. The forest trees, with their green foliage, swayed in the breeze. He beheld the sun flooding the heavens with light, coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. There were the bold summits of the hills reaching toward the sky; in the faraway distance rose the barren cliffs of the mountain wall of Moab; above all spread the tender blue of the overarching heavens. And beyond was God. He could not see Him, but His works were full of His praise. The light of day, gilding forest and mountain, meadow and stream, carried the mind up to behold the Father of lights, the Author of every good and perfect gift. Daily revelations of the character and majesty of his Creator filled the young poet's heart with adoration and rejoicing. In contemplation of God and His works the faculties of David's mind and heart were developing and strengthening for the work of his afterlife. He was daily coming into a more intimate communion with God. His mind was constantly penetrating into new depths for fresh themes to inspire his song and to wake the music of his harp. The rich melody of his voice poured out upon the air, echoed from the hills as if responsive to the rejoicing of the angels' songs in heaven.

Who can measure the results of those years of toil and wandering among the lonely hills? The communion with nature and with God, the care of his flocks, the perils and deliverances, the griefs and joys, of his lowly lot, were not only to mold the character of David and to influence his future life, but through the psalms of Israel's sweet singer they were in all coming ages to kindle love and faith in the hearts of God's people, bringing them nearer to the ever-loving heart of Him in whom all His creatures live.

David, in the beauty and vigor of his young manhood, was preparing to take a high position with the noblest of the earth. His talents,

as precious gifts from God, were employed to extol the glory of the divine Giver. His opportunities of contemplation and meditation served to enrich him with that wisdom and piety that made him beloved of God and angels. As he contemplated the perfections of his Creator, clearer conceptions of God opened before his soul. Obscure themes were illuminated, difficulties were made plain, perplexities were harmonized, and each ray of new light called forth fresh bursts of rapture, and sweeter anthems of devotion, to the glory of God and the Redeemer. The love that moved him, the sorrows that beset him, the triumphs that attended him, were all themes for his active thought; and as he beheld the love of God in all the providences of his life, his heart throbbed with more fervent adoration and gratitude, his voice rang out in a richer melody, his harp was swept with more exultant joy; and the shepherd boy proceeded from strength to strength, from knowledge to knowledge; for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him.

chapter 63

David and Goliath

WHEN King Saul realized that he had been rejected by God, and when he felt the force of the words of denunciation that had been addressed to him by the prophet, he was filled with bitter rebellion and despair. It was not true repentance that had bowed the proud head of the king. He had no clear perception of the offensive character of his sin, and did not arouse to the work of reforming his life, but brooded over what he thought was the injustice of God in depriving him of the throne of Israel and in taking the succession away from his posterity. He was ever occupied in anticipating the ruin that had been brought upon his house. He felt that the valor which he had displayed in encountering his enemies should offset his sin of disobedience. He did not accept with meekness the chastisement of God; but his haughty spirit became desperate, until he was on the verge of losing his reason. His counselors advised him to seek for the services of a skillful musician, in the hope that the soothing notes of a sweet instrument might calm his troubled spirit. In the providence of God, David, as a skillful performer upon the harp, was brought before the king. His lofty and heaven-inspired strains had the desired effect. The brooding melancholy that had settled like a dark cloud over the mind of Saul was charmed away.

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 16:14-23; 17.

When his services were not required at the court of Saul, David returned to his flocks among the hills and continued to maintain his simplicity of spirit and demeanor. Whenever it was necessary, he was recalled to minister before the king, to soothe the mind of the troubled monarch till the evil spirit should depart from him. But although Saul expressed delight in David and his music, the young shepherd went from the king's house to the fields and hills of his pasture with a sense of relief and gladness.

David was growing in favor with God and man. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he now set his heart more fully to do the will of God than ever before. He had new themes for thought. He had been in the court of the king and had seen the responsibilities of royalty. He had discovered some of the temptations that beset the soul of Saul and had penetrated some of the mysteries in the character and dealings of Israel's first king. He had seen the glory of royalty shadowed with a dark cloud of sorrow, and he knew that the household of Saul, in their private life, were far from happy. All these things served to bring troubled thoughts to him who had been anointed to be king over Israel. But while he was absorbed in deep meditation, and harassed by thoughts of anxiety, he turned to his harp, and called forth strains that elevated his mind to the Author of every good, and the dark clouds that seemed to shadow the horizon of the future were dispelled.

God was teaching David lessons of trust. As Moses was trained for his work, so the Lord was fitting the son of Jesse to become the guide of His chosen people. In his watchcare for his flocks, he was gaining an appreciation of the care that the Great Shepherd has for the sheep of His pasture.

The lonely hills and the wild ravines where David wandered with his flocks were the lurking place of beasts of prey. Not infrequently the lion from the thickets by the Jordan, or the bear from his lair among the hills, came, fierce with hunger, to attack the flocks. According to the custom of his time, David was armed only with his sling and shepherd's staff; yet he early gave proof of his strength and courage in

protecting his charge. Afterward describing these encounters, he said: "When there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." 1 Samuel 17:34, 35, R.V. His experience in these matters proved the heart of David and developed in him courage and fortitude and faith.

Even before he was summoned to the court of Saul, David had distinguished himself by deeds of valor. The officer who brought him to the notice of the king declared him to be "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters," and he said, "The Lord is with him."

When war was declared by Israel against the Philistines, three of the sons of Jesse joined the army under Saul; but David remained at home. After a time, however, he went to visit the camp of Saul. By his father's direction he was to carry a message and a gift to his elder brothers and to learn if they were still in safety and health. But, unknown to Jesse, the youthful shepherd had been entrusted with a higher mission. The armies of Israel were in peril, and David had been directed by an angel to save his people.

As David drew near to the army, he heard the sound of commotion, as if an engagement was about to begin. And "the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle." Israel and the Philistines were drawn up in array, army against army. David ran to the army, and came and saluted his brothers. While he was talking with them, Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, came forth, and with insulting language defied Israel and challenged them to provide a man from their ranks who would meet him in single combat. He repeated his challenge, and when David saw that all Israel were filled with fear, and learned that the Philistine's defiance was hurled at them day after day, without arousing a champion to silence the boaster, his spirit was stirred within him. He was fired with zeal to preserve the honor of the living God and the credit of His people.

The armies of Israel were depressed. Their courage failed. They



said one to another, "Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up." In shame and indignation, David exclaimed, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Eliab, David's eldest brother, when he heard these words, knew well the feelings that were stirring the young man's soul. Even as a shepherd, David had manifested daring, courage, and strength but rarely witnessed; and the mysterious visit of Samuel to their father's house, and his silent departure, had awakened in the minds of the brothers suspicions of the real object of his visit. Their jealousy had been aroused as they saw David honored above them, and they did not regard him with the respect and love due to his integrity and brotherly tenderness. They looked upon him as merely a stripling shepherd, and now the question which he asked was regarded by Eliab as a censure upon his own cowardice in making no attempt to silence the giant of the Philistines. The elder brother exclaimed angrily, "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." David's answer was respectful but decided: "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?"

The words of David were repeated to the king, who summoned the youth before him. Saul listened with astonishment to the words of the shepherd, as he said, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul strove to turn David from his purpose, but the young man was not to be moved. He replied in a simple, unassuming way, relating his experiences while guarding his father's flocks. And he said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee."

For forty days the host of Israel had trembled before the haughty challenge of the Philistine giant. Their hearts failed within them as they looked upon his massive form, in height measuring six cubits and

a span. Upon his head was a helmet of brass, he was clothed with a coat of mail that weighed five thousand shekels, and he had greaves of brass upon his legs. The coat was made of plates of brass that overlaid one another, like the scales of a fish, and they were so closely joined that no dart or arrow could possibly penetrate the armor. At his back the giant bore a huge javelin, or lance, also of brass. "The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and one bearing a shield went before him."

Morning and evening Goliath had approached the camp of Israel, saying with a loud voice, "Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

Though Saul had given David permission to accept Goliath's challenge, the king had small hope that David would be successful in his courageous undertaking. Command was given to clothe the youth in the king's own armor. The heavy helmet of brass was put upon his head, and the coat of mail was placed upon his body; the monarch's sword was at his side. Thus equipped, he started upon his errand, but ere long began to retrace his steps. The first thought in the minds of the anxious spectators was that David had decided not to risk his life in meeting an antagonist in so unequal an encounter. But this was far from the thought of the brave young man. When he returned to Saul he begged permission to lay aside the heavy armor, saying, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." He laid off the king's armor, and in its stead took only his staff in his hand, with his shepherd's scrip and a simple sling. Choosing five smooth stones out of the brook, he put them in his bag, and, with his sling in his hand, drew near to the Philistine. The giant strode boldly forward, expecting to meet the mightiest of the warriors of Israel. His armor-bearer walked

before him, and he looked as if nothing could withstand him. As he came nearer to David he saw but a stripling, called a boy because of his youth. David's countenance was ruddy with health, and his well-knit form, unprotected by armor, was displayed to advantage; yet between its youthful outline and the massive proportions of the Philistine, there was a marked contrast.

Goliath was filled with amazement and anger. "Am I a dog," he exclaimed, "that thou comest to me with staves?" Then he poured upon David the most terrible curses by all the gods of his knowledge. He cried in derision, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field."

David did not weaken before the champion of the Philistines. Stepping forward, he said to his antagonist: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

There was a ring of fearlessness in his tone, a look of triumph and rejoicing upon his fair countenance. This speech, given in a clear, musical voice, rang out on the air, and was distinctly heard by the listening thousands marshaled for war. The anger of Goliath was roused to the very highest heat. In his rage he pushed up the helmet that protected his forehead and rushed forward to wreak vengeance upon his opponent. The son of Jesse was preparing for his foe. "And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in the forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth."

Amazement spread along the lines of the two armies. They had been confident that David would be slain; but when the stone went whizzing through the air, straight to the mark, they saw the mighty warrior tremble, and reach forth his hands, as if he were struck with sudden blindness. The giant reeled, and staggered, and like a smitten oak, fell to the ground. David did not wait an instant. He sprang upon the prostrate form of the Philistine, and with both hands laid hold of Goliath's heavy sword. A moment before, the giant had boasted that with it he would sever the youth's head from his shoulders and give his body to the fowls of the air. Now it was lifted in the air, and then the head of the boaster rolled from his trunk, and a shout of exultation went up from the camp of Israel.

The Philistines were smitten with terror, and the confusion which ensued resulted in a precipitate retreat. The shouts of the triumphant Hebrews echoed along the summits of the mountains, as they rushed after their fleeing enemies; and they "pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron. And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents. And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent."



chapter 64

David a Fugitive

AFTER the slaying of Goliath, Saul kept David with him, and would not permit him to return to his father's house. And it came to pass that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Jonathan and David made a covenant to be united as brethren, and the king's son "stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." David was entrusted with important responsibilities, yet he preserved his modesty, and won the affection of the people as well as of the royal household.

"David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war." David was prudent and faithful, and it was evident that the blessing of God was with him. Saul at times realized his own unfitness for the government of Israel, and he felt that the kingdom would be more secure if there could be connected with him one who received instruction from the Lord. Saul hoped also that his connection with David would be a safeguard to himself. Since David was favored and shielded by the Lord, his presence might be a protection to Saul when he went out with him to war.

It was the providence of God that had connected David with Saul.

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 18 to 22.

God used Jonathan's friendship
with David to protect Israel's
future ruler from Saul's anger.

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David's position at court would give him a knowledge of affairs, in preparation for his future greatness. It would enable him to gain the confidence of the nation. The vicissitudes and hardships which befell him, through the enmity of Saul, would lead him to feel his dependence upon God, and to put his whole trust in Him. And the friendship of Jonathan for David was also of God's providence, to preserve the life of the future ruler of Israel. In all these things God was working out His gracious purposes, both for David and for the people of Israel.

Saul, however, did not long remain friendly to David. When Saul and David were returning from battle with the Philistines, "the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music." One company sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands," while another company took up the strain, and responded, "And David his ten thousands." The demon of jealousy entered the heart of the king. He was angry because David was exalted above himself in the song of the women of Israel. In place of subduing these envious feelings, he displayed the weakness of his character, and exclaimed, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?"

One great defect in the character of Saul was his love of approbation. This trait had had a controlling influence over his actions and thoughts; everything was marked by his desire for praise and self-exaltation. His standard of right and wrong was the low standard of popular applause. No man is safe who lives that he may please men, and does not seek first for the approbation of God. It was the ambition of Saul to be first in the estimation of men; and when this song of praise was sung, a settled conviction entered the mind of the king that David would obtain the hearts of the people and reign in his stead.

Saul opened his heart to the spirit of jealousy by which his soul was poisoned. Notwithstanding the lessons which he had received from the prophet Samuel, instructing him that God would accomplish

whatsoever He chose, and that no one could hinder it, the king made it evident that he had no true knowledge of the plans or power of God. The monarch of Israel was opposing his will to the will of the Infinite One. Saul had not learned, while ruling the kingdom of Israel, that he should rule his own spirit. He allowed his impulses to control his judgment, until he was plunged into a fury of passion. He had paroxysms of rage, when he was ready to take the life of any who dared oppose his will. From this frenzy he would pass into a state of despondency and self-contempt, and remorse would take possession of his soul.

He loved to hear David play upon his harp, and the evil spirit seemed to be charmed away for the time; but one day when the youth was ministering before him, and bringing sweet music from his instrument, accompanying his voice as he sang the praises of God, Saul suddenly threw his spear at the musician, for the purpose of putting an end to his life. David was preserved by the interposition of God, and without injury fled from the rage of the maddened king.

As Saul's hatred of David increased, he became more and more watchful to find an opportunity to take his life; but none of his plans against the anointed of the Lord were successful. Saul gave himself up to the control of the wicked spirit that ruled over him; while David trusted in Him who is mighty in counsel, and strong to deliver. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10), and David's prayer was continually directed to God, that he might walk before Him in a perfect way.

Desiring to be freed from the presence of his rival, the king "removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand. . . . But all Israel and Judah loved David." The people were not slow to see that David was a competent person, and that the affairs entrusted to his hands were managed with wisdom and skill. The counsels of the young man were of a wise and discreet character, and proved to be safe to follow; while the judgment of Saul was at times unreliable, and his decisions were not wise.

Though Saul was ever on the alert for an opportunity to destroy

PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS

David, he stood in fear of him, since it was evident that the Lord was with him. David's blameless character aroused the wrath of the king; he deemed that the very life and presence of David cast a reproach upon him, since by contrast it presented his own character to disadvantage. It was envy that made Saul miserable and put the humble subject of his throne in jeopardy. What untold mischief has this evil trait of character worked in our world! The same enmity existed in the heart of Saul that stirred the heart of Cain against his brother Abel, because Abel's works were righteous, and God honored him, and his own works were evil, and the Lord could not bless him. Envy is the offspring of pride, and if it is entertained in the heart, it will lead to hatred, and eventually to revenge and murder. Satan displayed his own character in exciting the fury of Saul against him who had never done him harm.

The king kept a strict watch upon David, hoping to find some occasion of indiscretion or rashness that might serve as an excuse to bring him into disgrace. He felt that he could not be satisfied until he could take the young man's life and still be justified before the nation for his evil act. He laid a snare for the feet of David, urging him to conduct the war against the Philistines with still greater vigor, and promising, as a reward of his valor, an alliance with the eldest daughter of the royal house. To this proposal David's modest answer was, "Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" The monarch manifested his insincerity by wedding the princess to another.

An attachment for David on the part of Michal, Saul's youngest daughter, afforded the king another opportunity to plot against his rival. Michal's hand was offered the young man on condition that evidence should be given of the defeat and slaughter of a specified number of their national foes. "Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines," but God shielded His servant. David returned a victor from the battle, to become the king's son-in-law. "Michal Saul's daughter loved him," and the monarch, enraged, saw that his plots had resulted in the elevation of him whom he sought to

destroy. He was still more assured that this was the man whom the Lord had said was better than he, and who should reign on the throne of Israel in his place. Throwing off all disguise, he issued a command to Jonathan and to the officers of the court to take the life of the one he hated.

Jonathan revealed the king's intention to David and bade him conceal himself while he would plead with his father to spare the life of the deliverer of Israel. He presented before the king what David had done to preserve the honor and even the life of the nation, and what terrible guilt would rest upon the murderer of the one whom God had used to scatter their enemies. The conscience of the king was touched, and his heart was softened. "And Saul sware, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain." David was brought to Saul, and he ministered in his presence, as he had done in the past.

Again war was declared between the Israelites and the Philistines, and David led the army against their enemies. A great victory was gained by the Hebrews, and the people of the realm praised his wisdom and heroism. This served to stir up the former bitterness of Saul against him. While the young man was playing before the king, filling the palace with sweet harmony, Saul's passion overcame him, and he hurled a javelin at David, thinking to pin the musician to the wall; but the angel of the Lord turned aside the deadly weapon. David escaped and fled to his own house. Saul sent spies that they might take him as he should come out in the morning, and put an end to his life.

Michal informed David of the purpose of her father. She urged him to flee for his life, and let him down from the window, thus enabling him to make his escape. He fled to Samuel at Ramah, and the prophet, fearless of the king's displeasure, welcomed the fugitive. The home of Samuel was a peaceful place in contrast with the royal palace. It was here, amid the hills, that the honored servant of the Lord continued his work. A company of seers was with him, and they studied closely the will of God and listened reverently to the words of instruction that fell from the lips of Samuel. Precious were the

lessons that David learned from the teacher of Israel. David believed that the troops of Saul would not be ordered to invade this sacred place, but no place seemed to be sacred to the darkened mind of the desperate king. David's connection with Samuel aroused the jealousy of the king, lest he who was revered as a prophet of God throughout all Israel should lend his influence to the advancement of Saul's rival. When the king learned where David was, he sent officers to bring him to Gibeah, where he intended to carry out his murderous design.

The messengers went on their way, intent upon taking David's life; but One greater than Saul controlled them. They were met by unseen angels, as was Balaam when he was on his way to curse Israel. They began to utter prophetic sayings of what would occur in the future, and proclaimed the glory and majesty of Jehovah. Thus God overruled the wrath of man and manifested His power to restrain evil, while He walled in His servant by a guard of angels.

The tidings reached Saul as he eagerly waited to have David in his power; but instead of feeling the rebuke of God, he was still more exasperated, and sent other messengers. These also were overpowered by the Spirit of God, and united with the first in prophesying. The third embassy was sent by the king; but when they came into the company of the prophets, the divine influence fell upon them also, and they prophesied. Saul then decided that he himself would go, for his fierce enmity had become uncontrollable. He was determined to wait for no further chance to kill David; as soon as he should come within reach of him, he intended with his own hand to slay him, whatever might be the consequences.

But an angel of God met him on the way and controlled him. The Spirit of God held him in Its power, and he went forward uttering prayers to God, interspersed with predictions and sacred melodies. He prophesied of the coming Messiah as the world's Redeemer. When he came to the prophet's home in Ramah, he laid aside the outer garments that betokened his rank, and all day and all night he lay before Samuel and his pupils, under the influence of the divine Spirit. The people were drawn together to witness this strange scene, and the

experience of the king was reported far and wide. Thus again, near the close of his reign, it became a proverb in Israel that Saul also was among the prophets.

Again the persecutor was defeated in his purpose. He assured David that he was at peace with him, but David had little confidence in the king's repentance. He took this opportunity to escape, lest the mood of the king should change, as formerly. His heart was wounded within him, and he longed to see his friend Jonathan once more. Conscious of his innocence, he sought the king's son and made a most touching appeal. "What have I done?" he asked, "what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" Jonathan believed that his father had changed his purpose and no longer intended to take the life of David. And Jonathan said unto him, "God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so." After the remarkable exhibition of the power of God, Jonathan could not believe that his father would still harm David, since this would be manifest rebellion against God. But David was not convinced. With intense earnestness he declared to Jonathan, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death."

At the time of the new moon a sacred festival was celebrated in Israel. This festival recurred upon the day following the interview between David and Jonathan. At this feast it was expected that both the young men would appear at the king's table; but David feared to be present, and it was arranged that he should visit his brothers in Bethlehem. On his return he was to hide himself in a field not far from the banqueting hall, for three days absenting himself from the presence of the king; and Jonathan would note the effect upon Saul. If inquiry should be made as to the whereabouts of the son of Jesse, Jonathan was to say that he had gone home to attend the sacrifice offered by his father's household. If no angry demonstrations were made by the king, but he should answer, "It is well," then it would be safe for David to return to the court. But if he should become

enraged at his absence, it would decide the matter of David's flight.

On the first day of the feast the king made no inquiry concerning the absence of David; but when his place was vacant the second day, he questioned, "Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor today? And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem: and he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table." When Saul heard these words, his anger was ungovernable. He declared that as long as David lived, Jonathan could not come to the throne of Israel, and he demanded that David should be sent for immediately, that he might be put to death. Jonathan again made intercession for his friend, pleading, "Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?" This appeal to the king only made him more satanic in his fury, and the spear which he had intended for David he now hurled at his own son.

The prince was grieved and indignant, and leaving the royal presence, he was no more a guest at the feast. His soul was bowed down with sorrow as he repaired at the appointed time to the spot where David was to learn the king's intentions toward him. Each fell upon the other's neck, and they wept bitterly. The dark passion of the king cast its shadow upon the life of the young men, and their grief was too intense for expression. Jonathan's last words fell upon the ear of David as they separated to pursue their different paths, "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever."

The king's son returned to Gibeah, and David hastened to reach Nob, a city but a few miles distant, and also belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. The tabernacle had been taken to this place from Shiloh, and here Ahimelech the high priest ministered. David knew not whither to flee for refuge, except to the servant of God. The priest looked upon him with astonishment, as he came in haste and appar-

ently alone, with a countenance marked by anxiety and sorrow. He inquired what had brought him there. The young man was in constant fear of discovery, and in his extremity he resorted to deception. David told the priest that he had been sent by the king on a secret errand, one which required the utmost expedition. Here he manifested a want of faith in God, and his sin resulted in causing the death of the high priest. Had the facts been plainly stated, Ahimelech would have known what course to pursue to preserve his life. God requires that truthfulness shall mark His people, even in the greatest peril. David asked the priest for five loaves of bread. There was nothing but hallowed bread in the possession of the man of God, but David succeeded in removing his scruples, and obtained the bread to satisfy his hunger.

A new danger now presented itself. Doeg, the chief of Saul's herdsmen, who had professed the faith of the Hebrews, was now paying his vows in the place of worship. At sight of this man David determined to make haste to secure another place of refuge, and to obtain some weapon with which to defend himself if defense should become necessary. He asked Ahimelech for a sword, and was told that he had none except the sword of Goliath, which had been kept as a relic in the tabernacle. David replied, "There is none like that; give it me." His courage revived as he grasped the sword that he had once used in destroying the champion of the Philistines.

David fled to Achish, the king of Gath; for he felt that there was more safety in the midst of the enemies of his people than in the dominions of Saul. But it was reported to Achish that David was the man who had slain the Philistine champion years before; and now he who had sought refuge with the foes of Israel found himself in great peril. But, feigning madness, he deceived his enemies and thus made his escape.

The first error of David was his distrust of God at Nob, and his second mistake was his deception before Achish. David had displayed noble traits of character, and his moral worth had won him favor with the people; but as trial came upon him, his faith was shaken, and human weakness appeared. He saw in every man a spy and a betrayer.



In a great emergency David had looked up to God with a steady eye of faith, and had vanquished the Philistine giant. He believed in God, he went in His name. But as he had been hunted and persecuted, perplexity and distress had nearly hidden his heavenly Father from his sight.

Yet this experience was serving to teach David wisdom; for it led him to realize his weakness and the necessity of constant dependence upon God. Oh, how precious is the sweet influence of the Spirit of God as it comes to depressed or despairing souls, encouraging the fainthearted, strengthening the feeble, and imparting courage and help to the tried servants of the Lord! Oh, what a God is ours, who deals gently with the erring and manifests His patience and tenderness in adversity, and when we are overwhelmed with some great sorrow!

Every failure on the part of the children of God is due to their lack of faith. When shadows encompass the soul, when we want light and guidance, we must look up; there is light beyond the darkness. David ought not to have distrusted God for one moment. He had cause for trusting in Him: he was the Lord's anointed, and in the midst of danger he had been protected by the angels of God; he had been armed with courage to do wonderful things; and if he had but removed his mind from the distressing situation in which he was placed, and had thought of God's power and majesty, he would have been at peace even in the midst of the shadows of death; he could with confidence have repeated the promise of the Lord, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed." Isaiah 54: 10.

Among the mountains of Judah, David sought refuge from the pursuit of Saul. He made good his escape to the cave of Adullam, a place that, with a small force, could be held against a large army. "And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him." The family of David could not feel secure, knowing that at any time the unreasonable suspicions of Saul might be directed against them on account of their relation to David. They had now learned—what was coming to be generally known in Israel—that God

David was hunted by the king's men.
With Goliath's great sword the fugi-
tive escaped to the Philistines.

had chosen David as the future ruler of His people; and they believed that they would be safer with him, even though he was a fugitive in a lonely cave, than they could be while exposed to the insane madness of a jealous king.

In the cave of Adullam the family were united in sympathy and affection. The son of Jesse could make melody with voice and harp as he sang, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psalm 133: 1. He had tasted the bitterness of distrust on the part of his own brothers; and the harmony that had taken the place of discord brought joy to the exile's heart. It was here that David composed the fifty-seventh psalm.

It was not long before David's company was joined by others who desired to escape the exactions of the king. There were many who had lost confidence in the ruler of Israel, for they could see that he was no longer guided by the Spirit of the Lord. "And everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented," resorted to David, "and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men." Here David had a little kingdom of his own, and in it order and discipline prevailed. But even in his retreat in the mountains he was far from feeling secure, for he received continual evidence that the king had not relinquished his murderous purpose.

He found a refuge for his parents with the king of Moab, and then, at a warning of danger from a prophet of the Lord, he fled from his hiding place to the forest of Hareth. The experience through which David was passing was not unnecessary or fruitless. God was giving him a course of discipline to fit him to become a wise general as well as a just and merciful king. With his band of fugitives he was gaining a preparation to take up the work that Saul, because of his murderous passion and blind indiscretion, was becoming wholly unfitted to do. Men cannot depart from the counsel of God and still retain that calmness and wisdom which will enable them to act with justice and discretion. There is no insanity so dreadful, so hopeless, as that of following human wisdom, unguided by the wisdom of God.

Saul had been preparing to ensnare and capture David in the cave of Adullam, and when it was discovered that David had left this place of refuge, the king was greatly enraged. The flight of David was a mystery to Saul. He could account for it only by the belief that there had been traitors in his camp, who had informed the son of Jesse of his proximity and design.

He affirmed to his counselors that a conspiracy had been formed against him, and with the offer of rich gifts and positions of honor he bribed them to reveal who among his people had befriended David. Doeg the Edomite turned informer. Moved by ambition and avarice, and by hatred of the priest, who had reproved his sins, Doeg reported David's visit to Ahimelech, representing the matter in such a light as to kindle Saul's anger against the man of God. The words of that mischievous tongue, set on fire of hell, stirred up the worst passions in Saul's heart. Maddened with rage, he declared that the whole family of the priest should perish. And the terrible decree was executed. Not only Ahimelech, but the members of his father's house—"fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod"—were slain at the king's command, by the murderous hand of Doeg.

"And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep." This is what Saul could do under the control of Satan. When God had said that the iniquity of the Amalekites was full, and had commanded him to destroy them utterly, he thought himself too compassionate to execute the divine sentence, and he spared that which was devoted to destruction; but now, without a command from God, under the guidance of Satan, he could slay the priests of the Lord and bring ruin upon the inhabitants of Nob. Such is the perversity of the human heart that has refused the guidance of God.

This deed filled all Israel with horror. It was the king whom they had chosen that had committed this outrage, and he had only done after the manner of the kings of other nations that feared not God. The ark was with them, but the priests of whom they had inquired were slain with the sword. What would come next?

The Magnanimity of David

AFTER Saul's atrocious slaughter of the priests of the Lord, "one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. And Abiathar showed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests. And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house. Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard."

Still hunted by the king, David found no place of rest or security. At Keilah his brave band saved the town from capture by the Philistines, but they were not safe, even among the people whom they had delivered. From Keilah they repaired to the wilderness of Ziph.

At this time, when there were so few bright spots in the path of David, he was rejoiced to receive an unexpected visit from Jonathan, who had learned the place of his refuge. Precious were the moments which these two friends passed in each other's society. They related their varied experiences, and Jonathan strengthened the heart of David, saying, "Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 22:20-23; 23 to 27.

THE MAGNANIMITY OF DAVID

thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth." As they talked of the wonderful dealings of God with David, the hunted fugitive was greatly encouraged. "And they two made a covenant before the Lord: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house."

After the visit of Jonathan, David encouraged his soul with songs of praise, accompanying his voice with his harp as he sang:

"In the Lord put I my trust:
How say ye to my soul,
Flee as a bird to your mountain?
For, lo, the wicked bend their bow,
They make ready their arrow upon the string,
That they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.
If the foundations be destroyed,
What can the righteous do?
The Lord is in His holy temple,
The Lord's throne is in heaven:
His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.
The Lord trieth the righteous:
But the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth."

Psalm 11:1-5.

The Ziphites, into whose wild regions David went from Keilah, sent word to Saul in Gibeah that they knew where David was hiding, and that they would guide the king to his retreat. But David, warned of their intentions, changed his position, seeking refuge in the mountains between Maon and the Dead Sea.

Again word was sent to Saul, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." David had only six hundred men in his company, while Saul advanced against him with an army of three thousand. In a secluded cave the son of Jesse and his men waited for the guidance of God as to what should be done. As Saul was pressing his way up the mountains, he turned aside, and entered, alone, the very cavern in which David and his band were hidden. When David's men saw this they urged their leader to kill Saul. The fact that the king was now in

their power was interpreted by them as certain evidence that God Himself had delivered the enemy into their hand, that they might destroy him. David was tempted to take this view of the matter; but the voice of conscience spoke to him, saying, "Touch not the anointed of the Lord."

David's men were still unwilling to leave Saul in peace, and they reminded their commander of the words of God, "Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily." But his conscience smote him afterward, because he had even marred the garment of the king.

Saul rose up and went out of the cave to continue his search, when a voice fell upon his startled ears, saying, "My lord the king." He turned to see who was addressing him, and lo! it was the son of Jesse, the man whom he had so long desired to have in his power that he might kill him. David bowed himself to the king, acknowledging him as his master. Then he addressed Saul in these words: "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord hath delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee; but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it."

When Saul heard the words of David he was humbled, and could not but admit their truthfulness. His feelings were deeply moved as he realized how completely he had been in the power of the man whose life he sought. David stood before him in conscious innocence. With a softened spirit, Saul exclaimed, "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept." Then he declared to David: "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. . . . For if a man find his enemy, will he

let him go well away? wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand." And David made a covenant with Saul that when this should take place he would favorably regard the house of Saul, and not cut off his name.

Knowing what he did of Saul's past course, David could put no confidence in the assurances of the king, nor hope that his penitent condition would long continue. So when Saul returned to his home David remained in the strongholds of the mountains.

The enmity that is cherished toward the servants of God by those who have yielded to the power of Satan changes at times to a feeling of reconciliation and favor, but the change does not always prove to be lasting. After evil-minded men have engaged in doing and saying wicked things against the Lord's servants, the conviction that they have been in the wrong sometimes takes deep hold upon their minds. The Spirit of the Lord strives with them, and they humble their hearts before God, and before those whose influence they have sought to destroy, and they may change their course toward them. But as they again open the door to the suggestions of the evil one, the old doubts are revived, the old enmity is awakened, and they return to engage in the same work which they repented of, and for a time abandoned. Again they speak evil, accusing and condemning in the bitterest manner the very ones to whom they made most humble confession. Satan can use such souls with far greater power after such a course has been pursued than he could before, because they have sinned against greater light.

"And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah." The death of Samuel was regarded as an irreparable loss by the nation of Israel. A great and good prophet and an eminent judge had fallen in death, and the grief of the people was deep and heartfelt. From his youth up Samuel had walked before Israel in the integrity of his heart; although Saul had been the acknowledged king, Samuel had wielded

a more powerful influence than he, because his record was one of faithfulness, obedience, and devotion. We read that he judged Israel all the days of his life.

As the people contrasted the course of Saul with that of Samuel, they saw what a mistake they had made in desiring a king that they might not be different from the nations around them. Many looked with alarm at the condition of society, fast becoming leavened with irreligion and godlessness. The example of their ruler was exerting a widespread influence, and well might Israel mourn that Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, was dead.

The nation had lost the founder and president of its sacred schools, but that was not all. It had lost him to whom the people had been accustomed to go with their great troubles—lost one who had constantly interceded with God in behalf of the best interests of its people. The intercession of Samuel had given a feeling of security; for “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16. The people felt now that God was forsaking them. The king seemed little less than a madman. Justice was perverted, and order was turned to confusion.

It was when the nation was racked with internal strife, when the calm, God-fearing counsel of Samuel seemed to be most needed, that God gave His aged servant rest. Bitter were the reflections of the people as they looked upon his quiet resting place, and remembered their folly in rejecting him as their ruler; for he had had so close a connection with Heaven that he seemed to bind all Israel to the throne of Jehovah. It was Samuel who had taught them to love and obey God; but now that he was dead, the people felt that they were left to the mercies of a king who was joined to Satan, and who would divorce the people from God and heaven.

David could not be present at the burial of Samuel, but he mourned for him as deeply and tenderly as a faithful son could mourn for a devoted father. He knew that Samuel's death had broken another bond of restraint from the actions of Saul, and he felt less secure than when the prophet lived. While the attention of Saul was engaged in

mourning for the death of Samuel, David took the opportunity to seek a place of greater security; so he fled to the wilderness of Paran. It was here that he composed the one hundred and twentieth and twenty-first psalms. In these desolate wilds, realizing that the prophet was dead, and the king was his enemy, he sang:

"My help cometh from the Lord,
Which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, He that keepeth Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep. . . .
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil:
He shall preserve thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore."

Psalm 121:2-8.

While David and his men were in the wilderness of Paran, they protected from the depredations of marauders the flocks and herds of a wealthy man named Nabal, who had vast possessions in that region. Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, but his character was churlish and niggardly.

It was the time of sheepshearing, a season of hospitality. David and his men were in sore need of provisions; and in accordance with the custom of the times, the son of Jesse sent ten young men to Nabal, bidding them greet him in their master's name; and he added: "Thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there aught missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel.* Ask thy young men, and they will show thee. Wherefore let the young men find favor in thine eyes; for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David."

David and his men had been like a wall of protection to the shep-

*Not Mount Carmel, but a place in the territory of Judah, near the hill town of Maon.

herds and flocks of Nabal; and now this rich man was asked to furnish from his abundance some relief to the necessities of those who had done him such valuable service. David and his men might have helped themselves from the flocks and herds, but they did not. They behaved themselves in an honest way. Their kindness, however, was lost upon Nabal. The answer he returned to David was indicative of his character: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"

When the young men returned empty-handed and related the affair to David, he was filled with indignation. He commanded his men to equip themselves for an encounter; for he had determined to punish the man who had denied him what was his right, and had added insult to injury. This impulsive movement was more in harmony with the character of Saul than with that of David, but the son of Jesse had yet to learn lessons of patience in the school of affliction.

One of Nabal's servants hastened to Abigail, the wife of Nabal, after he had dismissed David's young men, and told her what had happened. "Behold," he said, "David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household."

Without consulting her husband or telling him of her intention, Abigail made up an ample supply of provisions, which, laded upon asses, she sent forward in the charge of servants, and herself started out to meet the band of David. She met them in a covert of a hill. "And when Abigail saw David, she hastened, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and

fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience." Abigail addressed David with as much reverence as though speaking to a crowned monarch. Nabal had scornfully exclaimed, "Who is David?" but Abigail called him, "my lord." With kind words she sought to sooth his irritated feelings, and she pleaded with him in behalf of her husband. With nothing of ostentation or pride, but full of the wisdom and love of God, Abigail revealed the strength of her devotion to her household; and she made it plain to David that the unkind course of her husband was in no wise premeditated against him as a personal affront, but was simply the outburst of an unhappy and selfish nature.

"Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal." Abigail did not take to herself the credit of this reasoning to turn David from his hasty purpose, but gave to God the honor and the praise. She then offered her rich provision as a peace offering to the men of David, and still pleaded as if she herself were the one who had so excited the resentment of the chief.

"I pray thee," she said, "forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days." Abigail presented by implication the course that David ought to pursue. He should fight the battles of the Lord. He was not to seek revenge for personal wrongs, even though persecuted as a traitor. She continued: "Though man be risen up to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul, yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God. . . . And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee prince over Israel; that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offense of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my



lord hath avenged himself: and when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." 1 Samuel 25:29-31, R.V.

These words could have come only from the lips of one who had partaken of the wisdom from above. The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of the Son of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, and full of kindness and peace, shed a heavenly influence. Better impulses came to David, and he trembled as he thought what might have been the consequences of his rash purpose. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9. Would that there were many more like this woman of Israel, who would soothe the irritated feelings, prevent rash impulses, and quell great evils by words of calm and well-directed wisdom.

A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ, and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go. Abigail was a wise reprover and counselor. David's passion died away under the power of her influence and reasoning. He was convinced that he had taken an unwise course and had lost control of his own spirit.

With a humble heart he received the rebuke, in harmony with his own words, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil." Psalm 141:5. He gave thanks and blessings because she advised him righteously. There are many who, when they are reprov'd, think it praiseworthy if they receive the rebuke without becoming impatient; but how few take reproof with gratitude of heart and bless those who seek to save them from pursuing an evil course.

When Abigail returned home she found Nabal and his guests in the enjoyment of a great feast, which they had converted into a scene of drunken revelry. Not until the next morning did she relate to her

Abigail humbly urged David to forgive her husband's rude behavior, saying he had meant no personal affront.

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husband what had occurred in her interview with David. Nabal was a coward at heart; and when he realized how near his folly had brought him to a sudden death, he seemed smitten with paralysis. Fearful that David would still pursue his purpose of revenge, he was filled with horror, and sank down in a condition of helpless insensibility. After ten days he died. The life that God had given him had been only a curse to the world. In the midst of his rejoicing and making merry, God had said to him, as He said to the rich man of the parable, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." Luke 12:20.

David afterward married Abigail. He was already the husband of one wife, but the custom of the nations of his time had perverted his judgment and influenced his actions. Even great and good men have erred in following the practices of the world. The bitter result of marrying many wives was sorely felt throughout all the life of David.

After the death of Samuel, David was left in peace for a few months. Again he repaired to the solitude of the Ziphites; but these enemies, hoping to secure the favor of the king, informed him of David's hiding place. This intelligence aroused the demon of passion that had been slumbering in Saul's breast. Once more he summoned his men of arms and led them out in pursuit of David. But friendly spies brought tidings to the son of Jesse that Saul was again pursuing him; and with a few of his men, David started out to learn the location of his enemy. It was night when, cautiously advancing, they came upon the encampment, and saw before them the tents of the king and his attendants. They were unobserved, for the camp was quiet in slumber. David called upon his friends to go with him into the very midst of the foe. In answer to his question, "Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp?" Abishai promptly responded, "I will go down with thee."

Hidden by the deep shadows of the hills, David and his attendant entered the encampment of the enemy. As they sought to ascertain the exact number of their foes, they came upon Saul sleeping, his spear stuck in the ground, and a cruse of water at his head. Beside

him lay Abner, his chief commander, and all around them were the soldiers, locked in slumber. Abishai raised his spear, and said to David, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time." He waited for the word of permission; but there fell upon his ear the whispered words: "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? . . . As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them." How easily the Lord can weaken the strongest, remove prudence from the wisest, and baffle the skill of the most watchful!

When David was at a safe distance from the camp he stood on the top of a hill and cried with a loud voice to the people and to Abner, saying, "Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster. And Saul knew David's voice, and said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king. And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand? Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant." Again the acknowledgment fell from the lips of the king, "I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will not more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. And David answered and said, Behold the



king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it." Although Saul had made the promise, "I will no more do thee harm," David did not place himself in his power.

This second instance of David's respect for his sovereign's life made a still deeper impression upon the mind of Saul and brought from him a more humble acknowledgment of his fault. He was astonished and subdued at the manifestation of such kindness. In parting from David, Saul exclaimed, "Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." But the son of Jesse had no hope that the king would long continue in this frame of mind.

David despaired of a reconciliation with Saul. It seemed inevitable that he should at last fall a victim to the malice of the king, and he determined again to seek refuge in the land of the Philistines. With the six hundred men under his command, he passed over to Achish, the king of Gath.

David's conclusion that Saul would certainly accomplish his murderous purpose was formed without the counsel of God. Even while Saul was plotting and seeking to accomplish his destruction, the Lord was working to secure David the kingdom. God works out His plans, though to human eyes they are veiled in mystery. Men cannot understand the ways of God; and, looking at appearances, they interpret the trials and tests and provings that God permits to come upon them as things that are against them, and that will only work their ruin. Thus David looked on appearances, and not at the promises of God. He doubted that he would ever come to the throne. Long trials had wearied his faith and exhausted his patience.

The Lord did not send David for protection to the Philistines, the most bitter foes of Israel. This very nation would be among his worst enemies to the last, and yet he had fled to them for help in his time of need. Having lost all confidence in Saul and in those who served him, he threw himself upon the mercies of the enemies of his people. David was a brave general, and had proved himself a wise and successful warrior; but he was working directly against his own interests when

David refused to take Saul's life
but took his water bottle to use
as proof that he had been there.

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he went to the Philistines. God had appointed him to set up his standard in the land of Judah, and it was want of faith that led him to forsake his post of duty without a command from the Lord.

God was dishonored by David's unbelief. The Philistines had feared David more than they had feared Saul and his armies; and by placing himself under the protection of the Philistines, David discovered to them the weakness of his own people. Thus he encouraged these relentless foes to oppress Israel. David had been anointed to stand in defense of the people of God; and the Lord would not have His servants give encouragement to the wicked by disclosing the weakness of His people or by an appearance of indifference to their welfare. Furthermore, the impression was received by his brethren that he had gone to the heathen to serve their gods. By this act he gave occasion for misconstruing his motives, and many were led to hold prejudice against him. The very thing that Satan desired to have him do he was led to do; for, in seeking refuge among the Philistines, David caused great exultation to the enemies of God and His people. David did not renounce his worship of God nor cease his devotion to His cause; but he sacrificed his trust in Him to his personal safety, and thus tarnished the upright and faithful character that God requires His servants to possess.

David was cordially received by the king of the Philistines. The warmth of this reception was partly due to the fact that the king admired him and partly to the fact that it was flattering to his vanity to have a Hebrew seek his protection. David felt secure from betrayal in the dominions of Achish. He brought his family, his household, and his possessions, as did also his men; and to all appearance he had come to settle permanently in the land of Philistia. All this was gratifying to Achish, who promised to protect the fugitive Israelites.

At David's request for a residence in the country, removed from the royal city, the king graciously granted Ziklag as a possession. David realized that it would be dangerous for himself and his men to be under the influence of idolaters. In a town wholly separated for their use they might worship God with more freedom than they could if

they remained in Gath, where the heathen rites could not but prove a source of evil and annoyance.

While dwelling in this isolated town David made war upon the Geshurites, the Gezrites, and the Amalekites, and he left none alive to bring tidings to Gath. When he returned from battle he gave Achish to understand that he had been warring against those of his own nation, the men of Judah. By this dissembling he was the means of strengthening the hand of the Philistines; for the king said, "He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant forever." David knew that it was the will of God that those heathen tribes should be destroyed, and he knew that he was appointed to do this work; but he was not walking in the counsel of God when he practiced deception.

"And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men." David had no intention of lifting his hand against his people; but he was not certain as to what course he would pursue, until circumstances should indicate his duty. He answered the king evasively, and said, "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do." Achish understood these words as a promise of assistance in the approaching war, and pledged his word to bestow upon David great honor, and give him a high position at the Philistine court.

But although David's faith had staggered somewhat at the promises of God, he still remembered that Samuel had anointed him king of Israel. He recalled the victories that God had given him over his enemies in the past. He reviewed the great mercy of God in preserving him from the hand of Saul, and determined not to betray a sacred trust. Even though the king of Israel had sought his life, he would not join his forces with the enemies of his people.



chapter 66

The Death of Saul

AGAIN war was declared between Israel and the Philistines. "The Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem," on the northern edge of the plain of Jezreel; while Saul and his forces encamped but a few miles distant, at the foot of Mount Gilboa, on the southern border of the plain. It was on this plain that Gideon, with three hundred men, had put to flight the hosts of Midian. But the spirit that inspired Israel's deliverer was widely different from that which now stirred the heart of the king. Gideon went forth strong in faith in the mighty God of Jacob; but Saul felt himself to be alone and defenseless, because God had forsaken him. As he looked abroad upon the Philistine host, "he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled."

Saul had learned that David and his force were with the Philistines, and he expected that the son of Jesse would take this opportunity to revenge the wrongs he had suffered. The king was in sore distress. It was his own unreasoning passion, spurring him on to destroy the chosen of God, that had involved the nation in so great peril. While he had been engrossed in pursuing David he had neglected the defense of his kingdom. The Philistines, taking advantage of its unguarded condition, had penetrated into the very heart of the country. Thus

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 28; 31.

In desperation Saul went to the witch of Endor to find out, if possible, whether Israel would be victorious.

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while Satan had been urging Saul to employ every energy in hunting David, that he might destroy him, the same malignant spirit had inspired the Philistines to seize their opportunity to work Saul's ruin and overthrow the people of God. How often is the same policy still employed by the archenemy! He moves upon some unconsecrated heart to kindle envy and strife in the church, and then, taking advantage of the divided condition of God's people, he stirs up his agents to work their ruin.

On the morrow Saul must engage the Philistines in battle. The shadows of impending doom gathered dark about him; he longed for help and guidance. But it was in vain that he sought counsel from God. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." The Lord never turned away a soul that came to Him in sincerity and humility. Why did he turn Saul away unanswered? The king had by his own act forfeited the benefits of all the methods of inquiring of God. He had rejected the counsel of Samuel the prophet; he had exiled David, the chosen of God; he had slain the priests of the Lord. Could he expect to be answered by God when he had cut off the channels of communication that Heaven had ordained? He had sinned away the Spirit of grace, and could he be answered by dreams and revelations from the Lord? Saul did not turn to God with humility and repentance. It was not pardon for sin and reconciliation with God, that he sought, but deliverance from his foes. By his own stubbornness and rebellion he had cut himself off from God. There could be no return but by the way of penitence and contrition; but the proud monarch, in his anguish and despair, determined to seek help from another source.

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." Saul had a full knowledge of the character of necromancy. It had been expressly forbidden by the Lord, and the sentence of death was pronounced against all who practiced its unholy arts. During the life of Samuel, Saul had commanded that all wizards and those that had familiar spirits should be put to death; but now, in the rashness of despera-

tion, he had recourse to that oracle which he had condemned as an abomination.

It was told the king that a woman who had a familiar spirit was living in concealment at Endor. This woman had entered into covenant with Satan to yield herself to his control, to fulfill his purposes; and in return, the prince of evil wrought wonders for her and revealed secret things to her.

Disguising himself, Saul went forth by night with but two attendants, to seek the retreat of the sorceress. Oh, pitiable sight! the king of Israel led captive by Satan at his will! What path so dark for human feet to tread as that chosen by one who has persisted in having his own way, resisting the holy influences of the Spirit of God! What bondage so terrible as that of him who is given over to the control of the worst of tyrants—himself! Trust in God and obedience to His will were the only conditions upon which Saul could be king of Israel. Had he complied with these conditions throughout his reign, his kingdom would have been secure; God would have been his guide, the Omnipotent his shield. God had borne long with Saul; and although his rebellion and obstinacy had well-nigh silenced the divine voice in the soul, there was still opportunity for repentance. But when in his peril he turned from God to obtain light from a confederate of Satan, he had cut the last tie that bound him to his Maker; he had placed himself fully under the control of that demoniac power which for years had been exercised upon him, and which had brought him to the verge of destruction.

Under the cover of darkness Saul and his attendants made their way across the plain, and, safely passing the Philistine host, they crossed the mountain ridge, to the lonely home of the sorceress of Endor. Here the woman with a familiar spirit had hidden herself away that she might secretly continue her profane incantations. Disguised as he was, Saul's lofty stature and kingly port declared that he was no common soldier. The woman suspected that her visitor was Saul, and his rich gifts strengthened her suspicions. To his request, "I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him

up, whom I shall name unto thee," the woman answered, "Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" Then "Saul sware to her by the Lord, saying, As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing." And when she said, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" he answered, "Samuel."

After practicing her incantations, she said, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth. . . . An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself."

It was not God's holy prophet that came forth at the spell of a sorcerer's incantation. Samuel was not present in that haunt of evil spirits. That supernatural appearance was produced solely by the power of Satan. He could as easily assume the form of Samuel as he could assume that of an angel of light, when he tempted Christ in the wilderness.

The woman's first words under the spell of her incantation had been addressed to the king, "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." Thus the first act of the evil spirit which personated the prophet was to communicate secretly with this wicked woman, to warn her of the deception that had been practiced upon her. The message to Saul from the pretended prophet was, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

When Samuel was living, Saul had despised his counsel and had resented his reproofs. But now, in the hour of his distress and calamity, he felt that the prophet's guidance was his only hope, and in order to communicate with Heaven's ambassador he vainly had recourse to the messenger of hell! Saul had placed himself fully in the power of Satan; and now he whose only delight is in causing misery and destruc-

tion, made the most of his advantage, to work the ruin of the unhappy king. In answer to Saul's agonized entreaty came the terrible message, professedly from the lips of Samuel:

"Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines."

All through his course of rebellion Saul had been flattered and deceived by Satan. It is the tempter's work to belittle sin, to make the path of transgression easy and inviting, to blind the mind to the warnings and threatenings of the Lord. Satan, by his bewitching power, had led Saul to justify himself in defiance of Samuel's reproofs and warning. But now, in his extremity, he turned upon him, presenting the enormity of his sin and the hopelessness of pardon, that he might goad him to desperation. Nothing could have been better chosen to destroy his courage and confuse his judgment, or to drive him to despair and self-destruction.

Saul was faint with weariness and fasting; he was terrified and conscience-stricken. As the fearful prediction fell upon his ear, his form swayed like an oak before the tempest, and he fell prostrate to the earth.

The sorceress was filled with alarm. The king of Israel lay before her like one dead. Should he perish in her retreat, what would be the consequences to herself? She besought him to arise and partake of food, urging that since she had imperiled her life in granting his desire, he should yield to her request for the preservation of his own. His servants joining their entreaties, Saul yielded at last, and the woman set before him the fatted calf and unleavened bread hastily prepared. What a scene!—In the wild cave of the sorceress, which but a little before had echoed with the words of doom—in the presence

of Satan's messenger—he who had been anointed of God as king over Israel sat down to eat, in preparation for the day's deadly strife.

Before the break of day he returned with his attendants to the camp of Israel to make ready for the conflict. By consulting that spirit of darkness Saul had destroyed himself. Oppressed by the horror of despair, it would be impossible for him to inspire his army with courage. Separated from the Source of strength, he could not lead the minds of Israel to look to God as their helper. Thus the prediction of evil would work its own accomplishment.

On the plain of Shunem and the slopes of Mount Gilboa the armies of Israel and the hosts of the Philistines closed in mortal combat. Though the fearful scene in the cave of Endor had driven all hope from his heart, Saul fought with desperate valor for his throne and his kingdom. But it was in vain. "The men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa." Three brave sons of the king died at his side. The archers pressed upon Saul. He had seen his soldiers falling around him and his princely sons cut down by the sword. Himself wounded, he could neither fight nor fly. Escape was impossible, and determined not to be taken alive by the Philistines, he bade his armor-bearer, "Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith." When the man refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed, Saul took his own life by falling upon his sword.

Thus the first king of Israel perished, with the guilt of self-murder upon his soul. His life had been a failure, and he went down in dishonor and despair, because he had set up his own perverse will against the will of God.

The tidings of defeat spread far and wide, carrying terror to all Israel. The people fled from the cities, and the Philistines took undisturbed possession. Saul's reign, independent of God, had well-nigh proved the ruin of his people.

On the day following the engagement, the Philistines, searching the battlefield to rob the slain, discovered the bodies of Saul and his three sons. To complete their triumph, they cut off the head of Saul and stripped him of his armor; then the head and the armor, reeking

with blood, were sent to the country of the Philistines as a trophy of victory, "to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people." The armor was finally put in "the house of Ashtaroth," while the head was fastened in the temple of Dagon. Thus the glory of the victory was ascribed to the power of these false gods, and the name of Jehovah was dishonored.

The dead bodies of Saul and his sons were dragged to Beth-shan, a city not far from Gilboa, and near the river Jordan. Here they were hung up in chains, to be devoured by birds of prey. But the brave men of Jabesh-gilead, remembering Saul's deliverance of their city in his earlier and happier years, now manifested their gratitude by rescuing the bodies of the king and princes, and giving them honorable burial. Crossing the Jordan by night, they "took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days." Thus the noble deed performed forty years before, secured for Saul and his sons burial by tender and pitying hands in that dark hour of defeat and dishonor.



chapter 67

Ancient and Modern Sorcery

THE Scripture account of Saul's visit to the woman of Endor has been a source of perplexity to many students of the Bible. There are some who take the position that Samuel was actually present at the interview with Saul, but the Bible itself furnishes sufficient ground for a contrary conclusion. If, as claimed by some, Samuel was in heaven, he must have been summoned thence, either by the power of God or by that of Satan. None can believe for a moment that Satan had power to call the holy prophet of God from heaven to honor the incantations of an abandoned woman. Nor can we conclude that God summoned him to the witch's cave; for the Lord had already refused to communicate with Saul, by dreams, by Urim, or by prophets. 1 Samuel 28:6. These were God's own appointed mediums of communication, and He did not pass them by to deliver the message through the agent of Satan.

The message itself is sufficient evidence of its origin. Its object was not to lead Saul to repentance, but to urge him on to ruin; and this is not the work of God, but of Satan. Furthermore, the act of Saul in consulting a sorceress is cited in Scripture as one reason why he was rejected by God and abandoned to destruction: "Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, *to inquire of it*; and inquired not of the Lord: therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David

Apparitions which purport to be
spirits of the departed appear in
séances and deceive misguided souls.

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the son of Jesse." 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14. Here it is distinctly stated that Saul inquired of the familiar spirit, not of the Lord. He did not communicate with Samuel, the prophet of God; but through the sorceress he held intercourse with Satan. Satan could not present the real Samuel, but he did present a counterfeit, that served his purpose of deception.

Nearly all forms of ancient sorcery and witchcraft were founded upon a belief in communion with the dead. Those who practiced the arts of necromancy claimed to have intercourse with departed spirits, and to obtain through them a knowledge of future events. This custom of consulting the dead is referred to in the prophecy of Isaiah: "When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? *for the living to the dead?*" Isaiah 8:19.

This same belief in communion with the dead formed the cornerstone of heathen idolatry. The gods of the heathen were believed to be the deified spirits of departed heroes. Thus the religion of the heathen was a worship of the dead. This is evident from the Scriptures. In the account of the sin of Israel at Beth-peor, it is stated: "Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor." Numbers 25:1-3. The psalmist tells us to what kind of gods these sacrifices were offered. Speaking of the same apostasy of the Israelites, he says, "They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and *ate the sacrifices of the dead*" (Psalm 106:28); that is, sacrifices that had been offered to the dead.

The deification of the dead has held a prominent place in nearly every system of heathenism, as has also the supposed communion with the dead. The gods were believed to communicate their will to men, and also, when consulted, to give them counsel. Of this character were the famous oracles of Greece and Rome.

The belief in communion with the dead is still held, even in professedly Christian lands. Under the name of spiritualism the practice

of communicating with beings claiming to be the spirits of the departed has become widespread. It is calculated to take hold of the sympathies of those who have laid their loved ones in the grave. Spiritual beings sometimes appear to persons in the form of their deceased friends, and relate incidents connected with their lives and perform acts which they performed while living. In this way they lead men to believe that their dead friends are angels, hovering over them and communicating with them. Those who thus assume to be the spirits of the departed are regarded with a certain idolatry, and with many their word has greater weight than the Word of God.

There are many, however, who regard spiritualism as a mere imposture. The manifestations by which it supports its claims to a supernatural character are attributed to fraud on the part of the medium. But while it is true that the results of trickery have often been palmed off as genuine manifestations, there have also been marked evidences of supernatural power. And many who reject spiritualism as the result of human skill or cunning will, when confronted with manifestations which they cannot account for upon this ground, be led to acknowledge its claims.

Modern spiritualism and the forms of ancient witchcraft and idol worship—all having communion with the dead as their vital principle—are founded upon that first lie by which Satan beguiled Eve in Eden: "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, . . . ye shall be as gods." Genesis 3:4, 5. Alike based upon falsehood and perpetuating the same, they are alike from the father of lies.

The Hebrews were expressly forbidden to engage in any manner in pretended communion with the dead. God closed this door effectually when He said: "The dead know not anything. . . . Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun." Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalm 146:4. And the Lord declared to Israel: "The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will

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even set My face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people." Leviticus 20:6.

The "familiar spirits" were not the spirits of the dead, but evil angels, the messengers of Satan. Ancient idolatry, which, as we have seen, comprises both worship of the dead and pretended communion with them, is declared by the Bible to have been demon worship. The apostle Paul, in warning his brethren against participating, in any manner, in the idolatry of their heathen neighbors, says, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." 1 Corinthians 10:20. The psalmist, speaking of Israel, says that "they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils," and in the next verse he explains that they sacrificed them "unto the idols of Canaan." Psalm 106:37, 38. In their supposed worship of dead men they were in reality worshiping demons.

Modern spiritualism, resting upon the same foundation, is but a revival in a new form of the witchcraft and demon worship that God condemned and prohibited of old. It is foretold in the Scriptures, which declare that "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, points to the special working of Satan in spiritualism as an event to take place immediately before the second advent of Christ. Speaking of Christ's second coming, he declares that it is "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." 2 Thessalonians 2:9. And Peter, describing the dangers to which the church was to be exposed in the last days, says that as there were false prophets who led Israel into sin, so there will be false teachers, "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. . . . And many shall follow their pernicious ways." 2 Peter 2:1, 2. Here the apostle has pointed out one of the marked characteristics of spiritualist teachers. They refuse to acknowledge Christ as the Son of God. Concerning such teachers the beloved John declares: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth

the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." 1 John 2:22, 23. Spiritualism, by denying Christ, denies both the Father and the Son, and the Bible pronounces it the manifestation of antichrist.

By the prediction of Saul's doom, given through the woman of Endor, Satan planned to ensnare the people of Israel. He hoped that they would be inspired with confidence in the sorceress, and would be led to consult her. Thus they would turn from God as their counselor and would place themselves under the guidance of Satan. The lure by which spiritualism attracts the multitudes is its pretended power to draw aside the veil from the future and reveal to men what God has hidden. God has in His Word opened before us the great events of the future—all that it is essential for us to know—and He has given us a safe guide for our feet amid all its perils; but it is Satan's purpose to destroy men's confidence in God, to make them dissatisfied with their condition in life, and to lead them to seek a knowledge of what God has wisely veiled from them, and to despise what He has revealed in His Holy Word.

There are many who become restless when they cannot know the definite outcome of affairs. They cannot endure uncertainty, and in their impatience they refuse to wait to see the salvation of God. Apprehended evils drive them nearly distracted. They give way to their rebellious feelings, and run hither and thither in passionate grief, seeking intelligence concerning that which has not been revealed. If they would but trust in God, and watch unto prayer, they would find divine consolation. Their spirit would be calmed by communion with God. The weary and the heavy-laden would find rest unto their souls if they would only go to Jesus; but when they neglect the means that God has ordained for their comfort, and resort to other sources, hoping to learn what God has withheld, they commit the error of Saul, and thereby gain only a knowledge of evil.

God is not pleased with this course, and has expressed it in the most explicit terms. This impatient haste to tear away the veil from the future reveals a lack of faith in God and leaves the soul open to

the suggestions of the master deceiver. Satan leads men to consult those that have familiar spirits; and by revealing hidden things of the past, he inspires confidence in his power to foretell things to come. By experience gained through the long ages he can reason from cause to effect and often forecast, with a degree of accuracy, some of the future events of man's life. Thus he is enabled to deceive poor, misguided souls and bring them under his power and lead them captive at his will.

God has given us the warning by His prophet: "When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8: 19, 20.

Shall those who have a holy God, infinite in wisdom and power, go unto wizards, whose knowledge comes from intimacy with the enemy of our Lord? God Himself is the light of His people; He bids them fix their eyes by faith upon the glories that are veiled from human sight. The Sun of Righteousness sends its bright beams into their hearts; they have light from the throne of heaven, and they have no desire to turn away from the source of light to the messengers of Satan.

The demon's message to Saul, although it was a denunciation of sin and a prophecy of retribution, was not meant to reform him, but to goad him to despair and ruin. Oftener, however, it serves the tempter's purpose best to lure men to destruction by flattery. The teaching of the demon gods in ancient times fostered the vilest license. The divine precepts condemning sin and enforcing righteousness were set aside; truth was lightly regarded, and impurity was not only permitted but enjoined. Spiritualism declares that there is no death, no sin, no judgment, no retribution; that "men are unfallen demigods;" that desire is the highest law; and that man is accountable only to himself. The barriers that God has erected to guard truth, purity, and reverence are broken down, and many are thus emboldened in sin. Does not

such teaching suggest an origin similar to that of demon worship?

The Lord presented before Israel the results of holding communion with evil spirits, in the abominations of the Canaanites: they were without natural affection, idolaters, adulterers, murderers, and abominable by every corrupt thought and revolting practice. Men do not know their own hearts; for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jeremiah 17:9. But God understands the tendencies of the depraved nature of man. Then, as now, Satan was watching to bring about conditions favorable to rebellion, that the people of Israel might make themselves as abhorrent to God as were the Canaanites. The adversary of souls is ever on the alert to open channels for the unrestrained flow of evil in us; for he desires that we may be ruined, and be condemned before God.

Satan was determined to keep his hold on the land of Canaan, and when it was made the habitation of the children of Israel, and the law of God was made the law of the land, he hated Israel with a cruel and malignant hatred and plotted their destruction. Through the agency of evil spirits strange gods were introduced; and because of transgression, the chosen people were finally scattered from the Land of Promise. This history Satan is striving to repeat in our day. God is leading His people out from the abominations of the world, that they may keep His law; and because of this, the rage of "the accuser of our brethren" knows no bounds. "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." Revelation 12:10, 12. The antitypical land of promise is just before us, and Satan is determined to destroy the people of God and cut them off from their inheritance. The admonition, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38), was never more needed than now.

The word of the Lord to ancient Israel is addressed also to His people in this age: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them;" "for all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord." Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:12.

David at Ziklag

DAVID and his men had not taken part in the battle between Saul and the Philistines, though they had marched with the Philistines to the field of conflict. As the two armies prepared to join battle the son of Jesse found himself in a situation of great perplexity. It was expected that he would fight for the Philistines. Should he in the engagement quit the post assigned him and retire from the field, he would not only brand himself with cowardice, but with ingratitude and treachery to Achish, who had protected him and confided in him. Such an act would cover his name with infamy, and would expose him to the wrath of enemies more to be feared than Saul. Yet he could not for a moment consent to fight against Israel. Should he do this, he would become a traitor to his country—the enemy of God and of His people. It would forever bar his way to the throne of Israel; and should Saul be slain in the engagement, his death would be charged upon David.

David was caused to feel that he had missed his path. Far better would it have been for him to find refuge in God's strong fortresses of the mountains than with the avowed enemies of Jehovah and His people. But the Lord in His great mercy did not punish this error of His servant by leaving him to himself in his distress and perplexity; for though David, losing his grasp on divine power, had faltered and turned aside from the path of strict integrity, it was still the purpose

This chapter is based on 1 Samuel 29; 30; 2 Samuel 1.

of his heart to be true to God. While Satan and his host were busy helping the adversaries of God and of Israel to plan against a king who had forsaken God, the angels of the Lord were working to deliver David from the peril into which he had fallen. Heavenly messengers moved upon the Philistine princes to protest against the presence of David and his force with the army in the approaching conflict.

"What do these Hebrews here?" cried the Philistine lords, pressing about Achish. The latter, unwilling to part with so important an ally, answered, "Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?"

But the princes angrily persisted in their demand: "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" The slaughter of their famed champion and the triumph of Israel upon that occasion were still fresh in the memory of the Philistine lords. They did not believe that David would fight against his own people; and should he, in the heat of battle, take sides with them, he could inflict greater harm on the Philistines than would the whole of Saul's army.

Thus Achish was forced to yield, and calling David, said unto him, "Surely as Jehovah liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day. Nevertheless the lords favor thee not. Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines."

David, fearing to betray his real feelings, answered, "But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

The reply of Achish must have sent a thrill of shame and remorse

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through David's heart, as he thought how unworthy of a servant of Jehovah were the deceptions to which he had stooped. "I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God," said the king: "notwithstanding, the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants that are come with thee: and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart." Thus the snare in which David had become entangled was broken, and he was set free.

After three days' travel David and his band of six hundred men reached Ziklag, their Philistine home. But a scene of desolation met their view. The Amalekites, taking advantage of David's absence, with his force, had avenged themselves for his incursions into their territory. They had surprised the city while it was left unguarded, and having sacked and burned it, had departed, taking all the women and children as captives, with much spoil.

Dumb with horror and amazement, David and his men for a little time gazed in silence upon the blackened and smoldering ruins. Then as a sense of their terrible desolation burst upon them, those battle-scarred warriors "lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep."

Here again David was chastened for the lack of faith that had led him to place himself among the Philistines. He had opportunity to see how much safety could be found among the foes of God and His people. David's followers turned upon him as the cause of their calamities. He had provoked the vengeance of the Amalekites by his attack upon them; yet, too confident of security in the midst of his enemies, he had left the city unguarded. Maddened with grief and rage, his soldiers were now ready for any desperate measures, and they threatened even to stone their leader.

David seemed to be cut off from every human support. All that he held dear on earth had been swept from him. Saul had driven him from his country; the Philistines had driven him from the camp; the Amalekites had plundered his city; his wives and children had been

made prisoners; and his own familiar friends had banded against him, and threatened him even with death. In this hour of utmost extremity David, instead of permitting his mind to dwell upon these painful circumstances, looked earnestly to God for help. He "encouraged himself in the Lord." He reviewed his past eventful life. Wherein had the Lord ever forsaken him? His soul was refreshed in recalling the many evidences of God's favor. The followers of David, by their discontent and impatience, made their affliction doubly grievous; but the man of God, having even greater cause for grief, bore himself with fortitude. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee" (Psalm 56:3), was the language of his heart. Though he himself could not discern a way out of the difficulty, God could see it, and would teach him what to do.

Sending for Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "David inquired of the Lord, saying, If I pursue after this troop, shall I overtake them?" The answer was, "Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and shalt without fail recover all." 1 Samuel 30:8, R.V.

At these words the tumult of grief and passion ceased. David and his soldiers at once set out in pursuit of their fleeing foe. So rapid was their march, that upon reaching the brook Besor, which empties near Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea, two hundred of the band were compelled by exhaustion to remain behind. But David with the remaining four hundred pressed forward, nothing daunted.

Advancing, they came upon an Egyptian slave apparently about to perish from weariness and hunger. Upon receiving food and drink, however, he revived, and they learned that he had been left to die by his cruel master, an Amalekite belonging to the invading force. He told the story of the raid and pillage; and then, having exacted a promise that he should not be slain or delivered to his master, he consented to lead David's company to the camp of their enemies.

As they came in sight of the encampment a scene of revelry met their gaze. The victorious host were holding high festival. "They were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah." An immediate attack

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was ordered, and the pursuers rushed fiercely upon their prey. The Amalekites were surprised and thrown into confusion. The battle was continued all that night and the following day, until nearly the entire host was slain. Only a band of four hundred men, mounted upon camels, succeeded in making their escape. The word of the Lord was fulfilled. "David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor anything that they had taken to them: David recovered all."

When David had invaded the territory of the Amalekites, he had put to the sword all the inhabitants that fell into his hands. But for the restraining power of God the Amalekites would have retaliated by destroying the people of Ziklag. They decided to spare the captives, desiring to heighten the honor of the triumph by leading home a large number of prisoners, and intending afterward to sell them as slaves. Thus, unwittingly, they fulfilled God's purpose, keeping the prisoners unharmed, to be restored to their husbands and fathers.



All earthly powers are under the control of the Infinite One. To the mightiest ruler, to the most cruel oppressor, He says, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Job 38:11. God's power is constantly exercised to counteract the agencies of evil; He is ever at work among men, not for their destruction, but for their correction and preservation.

With great rejoicing the victors took up their homeward march. Upon reaching their companions who had remained behind, the more selfish and unruly of the four hundred urged that those who had had no part in the battle should not share the spoils; that it was enough for them to recover each his wife and children. But David would permit no such arrangement. "Ye shall not do so, my brethren," he said, "with that which the Lord hath given us. . . . As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike." Thus the matter was settled, and it afterward became a statute in Israel that all who were honorably connected with a military campaign should share the spoils equally with those who engaged in actual combat.

Besides recovering all the spoil that had been taken from Ziklag, David and his band had captured extensive flocks and herds belonging to the Amalekites. These were called "David's spoil;" and upon returning to Ziklag, he sent from this spoil presents to the elders of his own tribe of Judah. In this distribution all those were remembered who had befriended him and his followers in the mountain fastnesses, when he had been forced to flee from place to place for his life. Their kindness and sympathy, so precious to the hunted fugitive, were thus gratefully acknowledged.

It was the third day since David and his warriors returned to Ziklag. As they labored to restore their ruined homes, they watched with anxious hearts for tidings of the battle which they knew must have been fought between Israel and the Philistines. Suddenly a messenger entered the town, "with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head." He was at once brought to David, before whom he bowed with reverence, expressing recognition of him as a powerful prince, whose favor

he desired. David eagerly inquired how the battle had gone. The fugitive reported Saul's defeat and death, and the death of Jonathan. But he went beyond a simple statement of facts. Evidently supposing that David must cherish enmity toward his relentless persecutor, the stranger hoped to secure honor to himself as the slayer of the king. With an air of boasting the man went on to relate that during the battle he found the monarch of Israel wounded, and sore pressed by his foes, and that at his own request the messenger had slain him. The crown from his head and the golden bracelets from his arm he had brought to David. He confidently expected that these tidings would be hailed with joy, and that a rich reward would be his for the part that he had acted.

But "David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: and they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword."

The first shock of the fearful tidings past, David's thoughts returned to the stranger herald, and the crime of which, according to his own statement, he was guilty. The chief demanded of the young man, "Whence art thou?" And he answered, "I am the son of a stranger, and Amalekite. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" Twice David had had Saul in his power; but when urged to slay him, he had refused to lift his hand against him who had been consecrated by the command of God to rule over Israel. Yet the Amalekite feared not to boast that he had slain the king of Israel. He had accused himself of a crime worthy of death, and the penalty was inflicted at once. David said, "Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed."

David's grief at the death of Saul was sincere and deep, evincing the generosity of a noble nature. He did not exult in the fall of his enemy. The obstacle that had barred his access to the throne of Israel was removed, but at this he did not rejoice. Death had obliterated the

remembrance of Saul's distrust and cruelty, and now nothing in his history was thought of but that which was noble and kingly. The name of Saul was linked with that of Jonathan, whose friendship had been so true and so unselfish.

The song in which David gave utterance to the feelings of his heart became a treasure to his nation, and to the people of God in all subsequent ages:

"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!
 How are the mighty fallen!
 Tell it not in Gath,
 Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
 Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
 Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
 Ye mountains of Gilboa,
 Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, neither fields of offerings:
 For there the shield of the mighty was vilely cast away,
 The shield of Saul as of one not anointed with oil. . . .
 Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
 And in their death they were not divided;
 They were swifter than eagles,
 They were stronger than lions.
 Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
 Who clothed you in scarlet delicately,
 Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
 How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
 Jonathan is slain upon thy high places.
 I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
 Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
 Thy love to me was wonderful,
 Passing the love of women.
 How are the mighty fallen,
 And the weapons of war perished!"

2 Samuel 1:19-27, R.V.



David Called to the Throne

THE death of Saul removed the dangers that had made David an exile. The way was now open for him to return to his own land. When the days of mourning for Saul and Jonathan were ended, "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron."

Hebron was twenty miles north from Beersheba, and about midway between that city and the future site of Jerusalem. It was originally called Kirjath-arba, the city of Arba, the father of Anak. Later it was called Mamre, and here was the burial place of the patriarchs, "the cave of Machpelah." Hebron had been the possession of Caleb and was now the chief city of Judah. It lies in a valley surrounded by fertile hill country and fruitful lands. The most beautiful vineyards of Palestine were on its borders, together with numerous plantations of olive and other fruit trees.

David and his followers immediately prepared to obey the instruction which they had received from God. The six hundred armed men, with their wives and children, their flocks and herds, were soon on the way to Hebron. As the caravan entered the city the men of Judah

This chapter is based on 2 Samuel 2 to 5:5.

Upon the death of Saul, David was told by God to go to Hebron, where he was anointed king over Judah.

were waiting to welcome David as the future king of Israel. Arrangements were at once made for his coronation. "And there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." But no effort was made to establish his authority by force over the other tribes.

One of the first acts of the new-crowned monarch was to express his tender regard for the memory of Saul and Jonathan. Upon learning of the brave deed of the men of Jabesh-gilead in rescuing the bodies of the fallen leaders and giving them honorable burial, David sent an embassy to Jabesh with the message, "Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness." And he announced his own accession to the throne of Judah and invited the allegiance of those who had proved themselves so truehearted.

The Philistines did not oppose the action of Judah in making David king. They had befriended him in his exile, in order to harass and weaken the kingdom of Saul, and now they hoped that because of their former kindness to David the extension of his power would, in the end, work to their advantage. But David's reign was not to be free from trouble. With his coronation began the dark record of conspiracy and rebellion. David did not sit upon a traitor's throne; God had chosen him to be king of Israel, and there had been no occasion for distrust or opposition. Yet hardly had his authority been acknowledged by the men of Judah, when through the influence of Abner, Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, was proclaimed king, and set upon a rival throne in Israel.

Ishbosheth was but a weak and incompetent representative of the house of Saul, while David was pre-eminently qualified to bear the responsibilities of the kingdom. Abner, the chief agent in raising Ishbosheth to kingly power, had been commander-in-chief of Saul's army, and was the most distinguished man in Israel. Abner knew that David had been appointed by the Lord to the throne of Israel, but having so long hunted and pursued him, he was not now willing that the son of Jesse should succeed to the kingdom over which Saul had reigned.

The circumstances under which Abner was placed served to develop his real character and showed him to be ambitious and unprincipled. He had been intimately associated with Saul and had been influenced by the spirit of the king to despise the man whom God had chosen to reign over Israel. His hatred had been increased by the cutting rebuke that David had given him at the time when the cruse of water and the spear of the king had been taken from the side of Saul as he slept in the camp. He remembered how David had cried in the hearing of the king and the people of Israel, "Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? . . . This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed." This reproof had rankled in his breast, and he determined to carry out his revengeful purpose and create division in Israel, whereby he himself might be exalted. He employed the representative of departed royalty to advance his own selfish ambitions and purposes. He knew that the people loved Jonathan. His memory was cherished, and Saul's first successful campaigns had not been forgotten by the army. With determination worthy a better cause, this rebellious leader went forward to carry out his plans.

Mahanaim, on the farther side of Jordan, was chosen as the royal residence, since it offered the greatest security against attack, either from David or from the Philistines. Here the coronation of Ishbosheth took place. His reign was first accepted by the tribes east of Jordan, and was finally extended over all Israel except Judah. For two years the son of Saul enjoyed his honors in his secluded capital. But Abner, intent upon extending his power over all Israel, prepared for aggressive warfare. And "there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker."

At last treachery overthrew the throne that malice and ambition had established. Abner, becoming incensed against the weak and incompetent Ishbosheth, deserted to David, with the offer to bring over to him all the tribes of Israel. His proposals were accepted by the king,

and he was dismissed with honor to accomplish his purpose. But the favorable reception of so valiant and famed a warrior excited the jealousy of Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army. There was a blood feud between Abner and Joab, the former having slain Asahel, Joab's brother, during the war between Israel and Judah. Now Joab, seeing an opportunity to avenge his brother's death and rid himself of a prospective rival, basely took occasion to waylay and murder Abner.

David, upon hearing of this treacherous assault, exclaimed, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord forever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab; and on all his father's house." In view of the unsettled state of the kingdom, and the power and position of the murderers—for Joab's brother Abishai had been united with him—David could not visit the crime with just retribution, yet he publicly manifested his abhorrence of the bloody deed. The burial of Abner was attended with public honors. The army, with Joab at their head, were required to take part in the services of mourning, with rent garments and clothed in sackcloth. The king manifested his grief by keeping a fast upon the day of burial; he followed the bier as chief mourner; and at the grave he pronounced an elegy which was a cutting rebuke of the murderers. "The king lamented over Abner, and said:

"Died Abner as a fool dieth?
Thy hands were not bound,
Nor thy feet put into fetters:
As a man falleth before wicked men,
So fellest thou."

David's magnanimous recognition of one who had been his bitter enemy won the confidence and admiration of all Israel. "All the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner." In the private circle of his trusted counselors and attendants the king spoke of the crime, and recognizing his own inability to punish the murderers as he desired, he left them to the justice of God: "Know ye

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not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

Abner had been sincere in his offers and representations to David, yet his motives were base and selfish. He had persistently opposed the king of God's appointment, in the expectation of securing honor to himself. It was resentment, wounded pride, and passion that led him to forsake the cause he had so long served; and in deserting to David he hoped to receive the highest position of honor in his service. Had he succeeded in his purpose, his talents and ambition, his great influence and want of godliness, would have endangered the throne of David and the peace and prosperity of the nation.

"When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." It was evident that the kingdom could not long be maintained. Soon another act of treachery completed the downfall of the waning power. Ishbosheth was foully murdered by two of his captains, who, cutting off his head, hastened with it to the king of Judah, hoping thus to ingratiate themselves in his favor.

They appeared before David with the gory witness to their crime, saying, "Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy,



which sought thy life; and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed." But David, whose throne God Himself had established, and whom God had delivered from his adversaries, did not desire the aid of treachery to establish his power. He told these murderers of the doom visited upon him who boasted of slaying Saul. "How much more," he added, "when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them. . . . But they took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron."

After the death of Ishbosheth there was a general desire among the leading men of Israel that David should become king of all the tribes. "Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh." They declared, "Thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord." Thus through the providence of God the way had been opened for him to come to the throne. He had no personal ambition to gratify, for he had not sought the honor to which he had been brought.

More than eight thousand of the descendants of Aaron and of the Levites waited upon David. The change in the sentiments of the people was marked and decisive. The revolution was quiet and dignified, befitting the great work they were doing. Nearly half a million souls, the former subjects of Saul, thronged Hebron and its environs. The very hills and valleys were alive with the multitudes. The hour for the coronation was appointed; the man who had been expelled from the court of Saul, who had fled to the mountains and hills and to the caves of the earth to preserve his life, was about to receive the highest honor that can be conferred upon man by his fellow man. Priests and elders, clothed in the garments of their sacred office, officers and soldiers with glittering spear and helmet, and strangers from long dis-

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tances, stood to witness the coronation of the chosen king. David was arrayed in the royal robe. The sacred oil was put upon his brow by the high priest, for the anointing by Samuel had been prophetic of what would take place at the inauguration of the king. The time had come, and David, by solemn rite, was consecrated to his office as God's vicerent. The scepter was placed in his hands. The covenant of his righteous sovereignty was written, and the people gave their pledges of loyalty. The diadem was placed upon his brow, and the coronation ceremony was over. Israel had a king by divine appointment. He who had waited patiently for the Lord, beheld the promise of God fulfilled. "And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." 2 Samuel 5:10.



chapter 70

The Reign of David

AS SOON as David was established on the throne of Israel he began to seek a more appropriate location for the capital of his realm. Twenty miles from Hebron a place was selected as the future metropolis of the kingdom. Before Joshua had led the armies of Israel over Jordan it had been called Salem. Near this place Abraham had proved his loyalty to God. Eight hundred years before the coronation of David it had been the home of Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. It held a central and elevated position in the country and was protected by an environment of hills. Being on the border between Benjamin and Judah, it was in close proximity to Ephraim and was easy of access to the other tribes.

In order to secure this location the Hebrews must dispossess a remnant of the Canaanites, who held a fortified position on the mountains of Zion and Moriah. This stronghold was called Jebus, and its inhabitants were known as Jebusites. For centuries Jebus had been looked upon as impregnable; but it was besieged and taken by the Hebrews under the command of Joab, who, as the reward of his valor, was made commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel. Jebus now became the national capital, and its heathen name was changed to Jerusalem.

This chapter is based on 2 Samuel 5:6-25; 6; 7; 9; 10.

Shimei and Ziba, who had done wrong
in the rebellion, bowed before King
David and sought his forgiveness.

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Hiram, king of the wealthy city of Tyre, on the Mediterranean Sea, now sought an alliance with the king of Israel, and lent his aid to David in the work of erecting a palace at Jerusalem. Ambassadors were sent from Tyre, accompanied by architects and workmen and long trains laden with costly wood, cedar trees, and other valuable material.

The increasing strength of Israel in its union under David, the acquisition of the stronghold of Jebus, and the alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre, excited the hostility of the Philistines, and they again invaded the country with a strong force, taking up their position in the valley of Rephaim, but a short distance from Jerusalem. David with his men of war retired to the stronghold of Zion, to await divine direction. "And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand."

David advanced upon the enemy at once, defeated and destroyed them, and took from them the gods which they had brought with them to ensure their victory. Exasperated by the humiliation of their defeat, the Philistines gathered a still larger force, and returned to the conflict. And again they "spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim." Again David sought the Lord and the great I AM took the direction of the armies of Israel.

God instructed David, saying, "Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." If David, like Saul, had chosen his own way, success would not have attended him. But he did as the Lord had commanded, and he "smote the host of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gazer. And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations." 1 Chronicles 14: 16, 17.

Now that David was firmly established upon the throne and free

from the invasions of foreign foes, he turned to the accomplishment of a cherished purpose—to bring up the ark of God to Jerusalem. For many years the ark had remained at Kirjath-jearim, nine miles distant; but it was fitting that the capital of the nation should be honored with the token of the divine Presence.

David summoned thirty thousand of the leading men of Israel, for it was his purpose to make the occasion a scene of great rejoicing and imposing display. The people responded gladly to the call. The high priest, with his brethren in sacred office and the princes and leading men of the tribes, assembled at Kirjath-jearim. David was aglow with holy zeal. The ark was brought out from the house of Abinadab and placed upon a new cart drawn by oxen, while two of the sons of Abinadab attended it.

The men of Israel followed with exultant shouts and songs of rejoicing, a multitude of voices joining in melody with the sound of musical instruments; "David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord . . . on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals." It had been long since Israel had witnessed such a scene of triumph. With solemn gladness the vast procession wound its way along the hills and valleys toward the Holy City.

But "when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his rashness;* and there he died by the ark of God." A sudden terror fell upon the rejoicing throng. David was astonished and greatly alarmed, and in his heart he questioned the justice of God. He had been seeking to honor the ark as the symbol of the divine presence. Why, then, had that fearful judgment been sent to turn the season of gladness into an occasion of grief and mourning? Feeling that it would be unsafe to have the ark near him, David determined to let it remain where it was. A place was found for it nearby, at the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

The fate of Uzzah was a divine judgment upon the violation of a

*Marginal reading



most explicit command. Through Moses the Lord had given special instruction concerning the transportation of the ark. None but the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were to touch it, or even to look upon it uncovered. The divine direction was, "The sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." Numbers 4:15. The priests were to cover the ark, and then the Kohathites must lift it by the staves, which were placed in rings upon each side of the ark and were never removed. To the Gershonites and Merarites, who had in charge the curtains and boards and pillars of the tabernacle, Moses gave carts and oxen for the transportation of that which was committed to them. "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear *upon their shoulders*." Numbers 7:9. Thus in the bringing of the ark from Kirjath-jearim there had been a direct and inexcusable disregard of the Lord's directions.

David and his people had assembled to perform a sacred work, and they had engaged in it with glad and willing hearts; but the Lord could not accept the service, because it was not performed in accordance with His directions. The Philistines, who had not a knowledge of God's law, had placed the ark upon a cart when they returned it to Israel, and the Lord accepted the effort which they made. But the Israelites had in their hands a plain statement of the will of God in all these matters, and their neglect of these instructions was dishonoring to God. Upon Uzzah rested the greater guilt of presumption. Transgression of God's law had lessened his sense of its sacredness, and with unconfessed sins upon him he had, in face of the divine prohibition, presumed to touch the symbol of God's presence. God can accept no partial obedience, no lax way of treating His commandments. By the judgment upon Uzzah He designed to impress upon all Israel the importance of giving strict heed to His requirements. Thus the death of that one man, by leading the people to repentance, might prevent the necessity of inflicting judgments upon thousands.

Feeling that his own heart was not wholly right with God, David, seeing the stroke upon Uzzah, had feared the ark, lest some sin on his

The fate of Uzzah was a divine judgment upon the violation of God's most explicit command.

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part should bring judgments upon him. But Obed-edom, though he rejoiced with trembling, welcomed the sacred symbol as the pledge of God's favor to the obedient. The attention of all Israel was now directed to the Gittite and his household; all watched to see how it would fare with them. "And the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

Upon David the divine rebuke accomplished its work. He was led to realize as he had never realized before the sacredness of the law of God and the necessity of strict obedience. The favor shown to the house of Obed-edom led David again to hope that the ark might bring a blessing to him and to his people.

At the end of three months he resolved to make another attempt to remove the ark, and he now gave earnest heed to carry out in every particular the directions of the Lord. Again the chief men of the nation were summoned, and a vast assemblage gathered about the dwelling place of the Gittite. With reverent care the ark was now placed upon the shoulders of men of divine appointment, the multitude fell into line, and with trembling hearts the vast procession again set forth. After advancing six paces the trumpet sounded a halt. By David's direction sacrifices of "oxen and fatlings" were to be offered. Rejoicing now took the place of trembling and terror. The king had laid aside his royal robes and had attired himself in a plain linen ephod, such as was worn by the priests. He did not by this act signify that he assumed priestly functions, for the ephod was sometimes worn by others besides the priests. But in this holy service he would take his place as, before God, on an equality with his subjects. Upon that day Jehovah was to be adored. He was to be the sole object of reverence.

Again the long train was in motion, and the music of harp and cornet, trumpet and cymbal, floated heavenward, blended with the melody of many voices. "And David danced before the Lord," in his gladness keeping time to the measure of the song.

David's dancing in reverent joy before God has been cited by pleasure lovers in justification of the fashionable modern dance, but there is no ground for such an argument. In our day dancing is associated

with folly and midnight reveling. Health and morals are sacrificed to pleasure. By the frequenters of the ballroom God is not an object of thought and reverence; prayer or the song of praise would be felt to be out of place in their assemblies. This test should be decisive. Amusements that have a tendency to weaken the love for sacred things and lessen our joy in the service of God are not to be sought by Christians. The music and dancing in joyful praise to God at the removal of the ark had not the faintest resemblance to the dissipation of modern dancing. The one tended to the remembrance of God and exalted His holy name. The other is a device of Satan to cause men to forget God and to dishonor Him.

The triumphal procession approached the capital, following the sacred symbol of their invisible King. Then a burst of song demanded of the watchers upon the walls that the gates of the Holy City should be thrown open:

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.”

A band of singers and players answered:

“Who is this King of glory?”

From another company came the response:

“The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.”

Then hundreds of voices, uniting, swelled the triumphal chorus:

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.”

Again the joyful interrogation was heard, “Who is this King of glory?” And the voice of the great multitude, like “the sound of many waters,” was heard in the rapturous reply:

“The Lord of hosts,
He is the King of glory.” Psalm 24:7-10.

Then the gates were opened wide, the procession entered, and with reverent awe the ark was deposited in the tent that had been

prepared for its reception. Before the sacred enclosure altars for sacrifice were erected; the smoke of peace offerings and burnt offerings, and the clouds of incense, with the praises and supplications of Israel, ascended to heaven. The service ended, the king himself pronounced a benediction upon his people. Then with regal bounty he caused gifts of food and wine to be distributed for their refreshment.

All the tribes had been represented in this service, the celebration of the most sacred event that had yet marked the reign of David. The Spirit of divine inspiration had rested upon the king, and now as the last beams of the setting sun bathed the tabernacle in a hallowed light, his heart was uplifted in gratitude to God that the blessed symbol of His presence was now so near the throne of Israel.

Thus musing, David turned toward his palace, "to bless his household." But there was one who had witnessed the scene of rejoicing with a spirit widely different from that which moved the heart of David. "As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart." In the bitterness of her passion she could not await David's return to the palace, but went out to meet him, and to his kindly greeting poured forth a torrent of bitter words. Keen and cutting was the irony of her speech:

"How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!"

David felt that it was the service of God which Michal had despised and dishonored, and he sternly answered: "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor." To David's rebuke was added that of the Lord: because of her pride and arrogance, Michal "had no child unto the day of her death."

The solemn ceremonies attending the removal of the ark had made a lasting impression upon the people of Israel, arousing a deeper interest in the sanctuary service and kindling anew their zeal for Jehovah. David endeavored by every means in his power to deepen these impressions. The service of song was made a regular part of religious worship, and David composed psalms, not only for the use of the priests in the sanctuary service, but also to be sung by the people in their journeys to the national altar at the annual feasts. The influence thus exerted was far-reaching, and it resulted in freeing the nation from idolatry. Many of the surrounding peoples, beholding the prosperity of Israel, were led to think favorably of Israel's God, who had done such great things for His people.

The tabernacle built by Moses, with all that appertained to the sanctuary service, except the ark, was still at Gibeah. It was David's purpose to make Jerusalem the religious center of the nation. He had erected a palace for himself, and he felt that it was not fitting for the ark of God to rest within a tent. He determined to build for it a temple of such magnificence as should express Israel's appreciation of the honor granted the nation in the abiding presence of Jehovah their King. Communicating his purpose to the prophet Nathan, he received the encouraging response, "Do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee."

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, giving him a message for the king. David was to be deprived of the privilege of building a house for God, but he was granted an assurance of the divine favor to him, to his posterity, and to the kingdom of Israel: "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel; and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime."

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As David had desired to build a house for God, the promise was given, "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house. . . . I will set up thy seed after thee. . . . He shall build a house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever."

The reason why David was not to build the temple was declared: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house unto My name. . . . Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies: . . . his name shall be Solomon [peaceable], and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name." 1 Chronicles 22:8-10.

Though the cherished purpose of his heart had been denied, David received the message with gratitude. "Who am I, O Lord God?" he exclaimed, "and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come;" and he then renewed his covenant with God.

David knew that it would be an honor to his name and would bring glory to his government to perform the work that he had purposed in his heart to do, but he was ready to submit his will to the will of God. The grateful resignation thus manifested is rarely seen, even among Christians. How often do those who have passed the strength of manhood cling to the hope of accomplishing some great work upon which their hearts are set, but which they are unfitted to perform! God's providence may speak to them, as did His prophet to David, declaring that the work which they so much desire is not committed to them. It is theirs to prepare the way for another to accomplish it. But instead of gratefully submitting to the divine direction, many fall back as if slighted and rejected, feeling that if they cannot do the one thing which they desire to do, they will do nothing. Many cling with desperate energy to responsibilities which they are incapable of bearing, and vainly endeavor to accomplish a work for which they are insufficient, while that which they might do, lies neglected. And because of this lack of

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co-operation on their part the greater work is hindered or frustrated.

David, in his covenant with Jonathan, had promised that when he should have rest from his enemies he would show kindness to the house of Saul. In his prosperity, mindful of this covenant, the king made inquiry, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" He was told of a son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who had been lame from childhood. At the time of Saul's defeat by the Philistines at Jezreel, the nurse of this child, attempting to flee with him, had let him fall, thus making him a lifelong cripple. David now summoned the young man to court and received him with great kindness. The private possessions of Saul were restored to him for the support of his household; but the son of Jonathan was himself to be the constant guest of the king, sitting daily at the royal table. Through reports from the enemies of David, Mephibosheth had been led to cherish a strong prejudice against him as a usurper; but the monarch's generous and courteous reception of him and his continued kindness won the heart of the young man; he became strongly attached to David, and, like his father Jonathan, he felt that his interest was one with that of the king whom God had chosen.

After David's establishment upon the throne of Israel the nation enjoyed a long interval of peace. The surrounding peoples, seeing the



strength and unity of the kingdom, soon thought it prudent to desist from open hostilities; and David, occupied with the organization and upbuilding of his kingdom, refrained from aggressive war. At last, however, he made war upon Israel's old enemies, the Philistines, and upon the Moabites, and succeeded in overcoming both and making them tributary.

Then there was formed against the kingdom of David a vast coalition of the surrounding nations, out of which grew the greatest wars and victories of his reign and the most extensive accessions to his power. This hostile alliance, which really sprang from jealousy of David's increasing power, had been wholly unprovoked by him. The circumstances that led to its rise were these:

Tidings were received at Jerusalem announcing the death of Nahash, king of the Ammonites—a monarch who had shown kindness to David when he was a fugitive from the rage of Saul. Now, desiring to express his grateful appreciation of the favor shown him in his distress, David sent ambassadors with a message of sympathy to Hanun, the son and successor of the Ammonite king. "Said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me."

But his courteous act was misinterpreted. The Ammonites hated the true God and were the bitter enemies of Israel. The apparent kindness of Nahash to David had been prompted wholly by hostility to Saul as king of Israel. The message of David was misconstrued by Hanun's counselors. They "said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" It was by the advice of his counselors that Nahash, half a century before, had been led to make the cruel condition required of the people of Jabesh-gilead, when, besieged by the Ammonites, they sued for a covenant of peace. Nahash had demanded the privilege of thrusting out all their right eyes. The Ammonites still vividly remembered how the king of Israel had foiled their cruel design, and had rescued the people whom they

would have humbled and mutilated. The same hatred of Israel still prompted them. They could have no conception of the generous spirit that had inspired David's message. When Satan controls the minds of men he will excite envy and suspicion which will misconstrue the very best intentions. Listening to his counselors, Hanun regarded David's messengers as spies, and loaded them with scorn and insult.

The Ammonites had been permitted to carry out the evil purposes of their hearts without restraint, that their real character might be revealed to David. It was not God's will that Israel should enter into a league with this treacherous heathen people.

In ancient times, as now, the office of ambassador was held sacred. By the universal law of nations it ensured protection from personal violence or insult. The ambassador standing as a representative of his sovereign, any indignity offered to him demanded prompt retaliation. The Ammonites, knowing that the insult offered to Israel would surely be avenged, made preparation for war. "When the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots. . . . And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle." 1 Chronicles 19:6, 7.

It was indeed a formidable alliance. The inhabitants of the region lying between the river Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea had leagued with the Ammonites. The north and east of Canaan was encircled with armed foes, banded together to crush the kingdom of Israel.

The Hebrews did not wait for the invasion of their country. Their forces, under Joab, crossed the Jordan and advanced toward the Ammonite capital. As the Hebrew captain led his army to the field he sought to inspire them for the conflict, saying, "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the Lord do that which is good in His sight." 1 Chronicles 19:13. The united forces of the allies were overcome

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in the first engagement. But they were not yet willing to give over the contest, and the next year renewed the war. The king of Syria gathered his forces, threatening Israel with an immense army. David, realizing how much depended upon the result of this contest, took the field in person, and by the blessing of God inflicted upon the allies a defeat so disastrous that the Syrians, from Lebanon to the Euphrates, not only gave up the war, but became tributary to Israel. Against the Ammonites David pushed the war with vigor, until their strongholds fell and the whole region came under the dominion of Israel.

The dangers which had threatened the nation with utter destruction proved, through the providence of God, to be the very means by which it rose to unprecedented greatness. In commemorating his remarkable deliverances, David sings:

"The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of my salvation:
Even the God that executeth vengeance for me, and subdueth peoples under me.
He rescueth me from mine enemies:
Yea, Thou liftest me up above them that rise up against me:
Thou deliverest me from the violent man.
Therefore I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the nations,
And will sing praises unto Thy name.
Great deliverance giveth He to His king;
And sheweth loving-kindness to His anointed,
To David and to his seed, forevermore."

Psalm 18:46-50, R.V.

And throughout the songs of David the thought was impressed on his people that Jehovah was their strength and deliverer:

"There is no king saved by the multitude of a host:
A mighty man is not delivered by much strength.
A horse is a vain thing for safety:
Neither shall he deliver any by his great strength."

Psalm 33:16, 17.

"Thou art my King, O God:
Command deliverances for Jacob.
Through Thee will we push down our enemies:
Through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.

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For I will not trust in my bow,
Neither shall my sword save me.
But Thou hast saved us from our enemies,
And hast put them to shame that hated us." Psalm 44:4-7.

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses:
But we will remember the name of Jehovah our God." Psalm 20:7.

The kingdom of Israel had now reached in extent the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, and afterward repeated to Moses: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Genesis 15:18. Israel had become a mighty nation, respected and feared by surrounding peoples. In his own realm David's power had become very great. He commanded, as few sovereigns in any age have been able to command, the affections and allegiance of his people. He had honored God, and God was now honoring him.

But in the midst of prosperity lurked danger. In the time of his greatest outward triumph David was in the greatest peril, and met his most humiliating defeat.



chapter 71

David's Sin and Repentance

THE Bible has little to say in praise of men.

Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands. More than this—as all the lessons of Bible history teach—it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall. Man is contending with foes who are stronger than he. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places.” Ephesians 6: 12, margin. It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow. The tenor of the Bible is to inculcate distrust of human power and to encourage trust in divine power.

It was the spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation that prepared the way for David's fall. Flattery and the subtle allurements of power

This chapter is based on 2 Samuel 11; 12.

Nathan the prophet was sent by God to reprove King David for his crime of having Uriah the Hittite murdered.

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and luxury were not without effect upon him. Intercourse with surrounding nations also exerted an influence for evil. According to the customs prevailing among Eastern rulers, crimes not to be tolerated in subjects were uncondemned in the king; the monarch was not under obligation to exercise the same self-restraint as the subject. All this tended to lessen David's sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And instead of relying in humility upon the power of Jehovah, he began to trust to his own wisdom and might. As soon as Satan can separate the soul from God, the only Source of strength, he will seek to arouse the unholy desires of man's carnal nature. The work of the enemy is not abrupt; it is not, at the outset, sudden and startling; it is a secret undermining of the strongholds of principle. It begins in apparently small things—the neglect to be true to God and to rely upon Him wholly, the disposition to follow the customs and practices of the world.

Before the conclusion of the war with the Ammonites, David, leaving the conduct of the army to Joab, returned to Jerusalem. The Syrians had already submitted to Israel, and the complete overthrow of the Ammonites appeared certain. David was surrounded by the fruits of victory and the honors of his wise and able rule. It was now, while he was at ease and unguarded, that the tempter seized the opportunity to occupy his mind. The fact that God had taken David into so close connection with Himself and had manifested so great favor toward him, should have been to him the strongest of incentives to preserve his character unblemished. But when in ease and self-security he let go his hold upon God, David yielded to Satan and brought upon his soul the stain of guilt. He, the Heaven-appointed leader of the nation, chosen by God to execute His law, himself trampled upon its precepts. He who should have been a terror to evildoers, by his own act strengthened their hands.

Amid the perils of his earlier life David in conscious integrity could trust his case with God. The Lord's hand had guided him safely past the unnumbered snares that had been laid for his feet. But now, guilty and unrepentant, he did not ask help and guidance from Heaven, but sought to extricate himself from the dangers in which sin had involved

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him. Bathsheba, whose fatal beauty had proved a snare to the king, was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's bravest and most faithful officers. None could foresee what would be the result should the crime become known. The law of God pronounced the adulterer guilty of death, and the proud-spirited soldier, so shamefully wronged, might avenge himself by taking the life of the king or by exciting the nation to revolt.

Every effort which David made to conceal his guilt proved unavailing. He had betrayed himself into the power of Satan; danger surrounded him, dishonor more bitter than death was before him. There appeared but one way of escape, and in his desperation he was hurried on to add murder to adultery. He who had compassed the destruction of Saul was seeking to lead David also to ruin. Though the temptations were different, they were alike in leading to transgression of God's law. David reasoned that if Uriah were slain by the hand of enemies in battle, the guilt of his death could not be traced home to the king, Bathsheba would be free to become David's wife, suspicion could be averted, and the royal honor would be maintained.

Uriah was made the bearer of his own death warrant. A letter sent by his hand to Joab from the king commanded, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be



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smitten, and die." Joab, already stained with the guilt of one wanton murder, did not hesitate to obey the king's instructions, and Uriah fell by the sword of the children of Ammon.

Heretofore David's record as a ruler had been such as few monarchs have ever equaled. It is written of him that he "executed judgment and justice unto all his people." 2 Samuel 8: 15. His integrity had won the confidence and fealty of the nation. But as he departed from God and yielded himself to the wicked one, he became for the time the agent of Satan; yet he still held the position and authority that God had given him, and because of this, claimed obedience that would imperil the soul of him who should yield it. And Joab, whose allegiance had been given to the king rather than to God, transgressed God's law because the king commanded it.

David's power had been given him by God, but to be exercised only in harmony with the divine law. When he commanded that which was contrary to God's law, it became sin to obey. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13: 1), but we are not to obey them contrary to God's law. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, sets forth the principle by which we should be governed. He says, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11: 1.

An account of the execution of his order was sent to David, but so carefully worded as not to implicate either Joab or the king. Joab "charged the messenger saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, and if so be that the king's wrath arise, . . . then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. So the messenger went, and came and showed David all that Joab had sent him for."

The king's answer was, "Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him."

Bathsheba observed the customary days of mourning for her husband; and at their close "David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife." He whose tender conscience and high sense of

honor would not permit him, even when in peril of his life, to put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, had so fallen that he could wrong and murder one of his most faithful and most valiant soldiers, and hope to enjoy undisturbed the reward of his sin. Alas! how had the fine gold become dim! how had the most fine gold changed!

From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; "but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. Happy they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes. God in His mercy did not leave David to be lured to utter ruin by the deceitful rewards of sin.

For the sake of Israel also there was a necessity for God to interpose. As time passed on, David's sin toward Bathsheba became known, and suspicion was excited that he had planned the death of Uriah. The Lord was dishonored. He had favored and exalted David, and David's sin misrepresented the character of God and cast reproach upon His name. It tended to lower the standard of godliness in Israel, to lessen in many minds the abhorrence of sin; while those who did not love and fear God were by it emboldened in transgression.

Nathan the prophet was bidden to bear a message of reproof to David. It was a message terrible in its severity. To few sovereigns could such a reproof be given but at the price of certain death to the reprover. Nathan delivered the divine sentence unflinchingly, yet with such heaven-born wisdom as to engage the sympathies of the king, to arouse his conscience, and to call from his lips the sentence of death upon himself. Appealing to David as the divinely appointed guardian of his people's rights, the prophet repeated a story of wrong and oppression that demanded redress.

"There were two men in one city," he said, "the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and

with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

The anger of the king was roused, and he exclaimed, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing is worthy to die. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." 2 Samuel 12:5, 6, margin.

Nathan fixed his eyes upon the king; then, lifting his right hand to heaven, he solemnly declared, "Thou art the man." "Wherefore," he continued, "hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" The guilty may attempt, as David had done, to conceal their crime from men; they may seek to bury the evil deed forever from human sight or knowledge; but "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:13. "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." Matthew 10:26.

Nathan declared: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. . . . Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house. . . . Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor. . . . For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

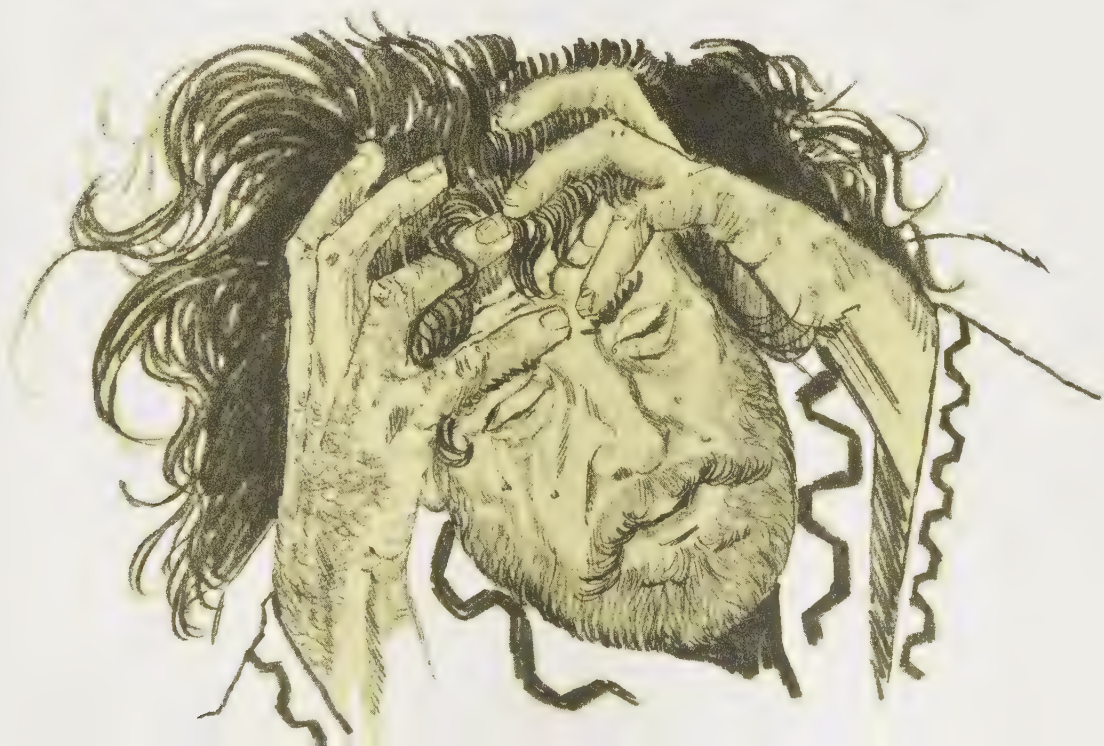
The prophet's rebuke touched the heart of David; conscience was aroused; his guilt appeared in all its enormity. His soul was bowed in penitence before God. With trembling lips he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." All wrong done to others reaches back from the injured one to God. David had committed a grievous sin, toward both

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Uriah and Bathsheba, and he keenly felt this. But infinitely greater was his sin against God.

Though there would be found none in Israel to execute the sentence of death upon the anointed of the Lord, David trembled, lest, guilty and unforgiven, he should be cut down by the swift judgment of God. But the message was sent him by the prophet, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Yet justice must be maintained. The sentence of death was transferred from David to the child of his sin. Thus the king was given opportunity for repentance; while to him the suffering and death of the child, as a part of his punishment, was far more bitter than his own death could have been. The prophet said, "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

When his child was stricken, David, with fasting and deep humiliation, pleaded for its life. He put off his royal robes, he laid aside his crown, and night after night he lay upon the earth, in heartbroken grief interceding for the innocent one suffering for his guilt. "The elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not." Often when judgments had been pronounced upon persons or cities, humiliation and repentance had turned aside the blow, and the Ever-Merciful, swift to pardon, had



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sent messengers of peace. Encouraged by this thought, David persevered in his supplication so long as the child was spared. Upon learning that it was dead, he quietly submitted to the decree of God. The first stroke had fallen of that retribution which he himself had declared just; but David, trusting in God's mercy, was not without comfort.

Very many, reading the history of David's fall, have inquired, "Why has this record been made public? Why did God see fit to throw open to the world this dark passage in the life of one so highly honored of Heaven?" The prophet, in his reproof to David, had declared concerning his sin, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." Through successive generations infidels have pointed to the character of David, bearing this dark stain, and have exclaimed in triumph and derision, "This is the man after God's own heart!" Thus a reproach has been brought upon religion, God and His Word have been blasphemed, souls have been hardened in unbelief, and many, under a cloak of piety, have become bold in sin.

But the history of David furnishes no countenance to sin. It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God's own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord. The Word of God plainly declares, "The thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord." 2 Samuel 11:27, margin. And the Lord said to David by the prophet, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? . . . Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me." Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed he himself had sown. The judgments upon him and upon his house testify to God's abhorrence of the sin.

Heretofore God's providence had preserved David against all the plottings of his enemies, and had been directly exercised to restrain Saul. But David's transgression had changed his relation to God. The Lord could not in any wise sanction iniquity. He could not exercise

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His power to protect David from the results of his sin as he had protected him from the enmity of Saul.

There was a great change in David himself. He was broken in spirit by the consciousness of his sin and its far-reaching results. He felt humbled in the eyes of his subjects. His influence was weakened. Hitherto his prosperity had been attributed to his conscientious obedience to the commandments of the Lord. But now his subjects, having a knowledge of his sin, would be led to sin more freely. His authority in his own household, his claim to respect and obedience from his sons, was weakened. A sense of his guilt kept him silent when he should have condemned sin; it made his arm feeble to execute justice in his house. His evil example exerted its influence upon his sons, and God would not interpose to prevent the result. He would permit things to take their natural course, and thus David was severely chastised.

For a whole year after his fall David lived in apparent security; there was no outward evidence of God's displeasure. But the divine sentence was hanging over him. Swiftly and surely a day of judgment and retribution was approaching, which no repentance could avert, agony and shame that would darken his whole earthly life. Those who, by pointing to the example of David, try to lessen the guilt of their own sins, should learn from the Bible record that the way of transgression is hard. Though like David they should turn from their evil course, the results of sin, even in this life, will be found bitter and hard to bear.

God intended the history of David's fall to serve as a warning that even those whom He has greatly blessed and favored are not to feel secure and neglect watchfulness and prayer. And thus it has proved to those who in humility have sought to learn the lesson that God designed to teach. From generation to generation thousands have thus been led to realize their own danger from the tempter's power. The fall of David, one so greatly honored by the Lord, has awakened in them distrust of self. They have felt that God alone could keep them by His power through faith. Knowing that in Him was their strength and safety, they have feared to take the first step on Satan's ground.

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Even before the divine sentence was pronounced against David he had begun to reap the fruit of transgression. His conscience was not at rest. The agony of spirit which he then endured is brought to view in the thirty-second psalm. He says:

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no guile.
When I kept silence, my bones waxed old
Through my roaring all the day long.
For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me:
My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer.”

Psalm 32: 1-4, R.V.

And the fifty-first psalm is an expression of David's repentance, when the message of reproof came to him from God:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness:
According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my
transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. . . .
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be
whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness;
That the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.
Hide Thy face from my sins,
And blot out all mine iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God;
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy presence;
And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;
And uphold me with Thy free Spirit.
Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways;
And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation:
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.” Psalm 51: 1-14.

Thus in a sacred song to be sung in the public assemblies of his people, in the presence of the court—priests and judges, princes and men of war—and which would preserve to the latest generation the

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knowledge of his fall, the king of Israel recounted his sin, his repentance, and his hope of pardon through the mercy of God. Instead of endeavoring to conceal his guilt he desired that others might be instructed by the sad history of his fall.

David's repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. David did not in despair give over the struggle. In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance.

"For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
Thou delightest not in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Psalm 51:16, 17.

Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell. In the joy of his release he sang:

"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.
I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;
And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. . . .
Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble;
Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

Psalm 32:5-7.

Many have murmured at what they called God's injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence.

This passage in David's history is full of significance to the repenting sinner. It is one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggle and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Through all the ages it has proved a source of encouragement to souls that, having fallen into

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sin, were struggling under the burden of their guilt. Thousands of the children of God, who have been betrayed into sin, when ready to give up to despair have remembered how David's sincere repentance and confession were accepted by God, notwithstanding he suffered for his transgression; and they also have taken courage to repent and try again to walk in the way of God's commandments.

Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God's promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will *abundantly* pardon." Isaiah 55:7.

The Rebellion of Absalom

"HE SHALL restore fourfold," had been David's unwitting sentence upon himself, on listening to the prophet Nathan's parable; and according to his own sentence he was to be judged. Four of his sons must fall, and the loss of each would be a result of the father's sin.

The shameful crime of Amnon, the first-born, was permitted by David to pass unpunished and unrebuked. The law pronounced death upon the adulterer, and the unnatural crime of Amnon made him doubly guilty. But David, self-condemned for his own sin, failed to bring the offender to justice. For two full years Absalom, the natural protector of the sister so foully wronged, concealed his purpose of revenge, but only to strike more surely at the last. At a feast of the king's sons the drunken, incestuous Amnon was slain by his brother's command.

Twofold judgment had been meted out to David. The terrible message was carried to him, "Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent." The king's sons, returning in alarm to Jerusalem, revealed to their father the truth; Amnon alone had been slain; and they

This chapter is based on 2 Samuel 13 to 19.

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“lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore.” But Absalom fled to Talmai, the king of Geshur, his mother’s father.

Like other sons of David, Amnon had been left to selfish indulgence. He had sought to gratify every thought of his heart, regardless of the requirements of God. Notwithstanding his great sin, God had borne long with him. For two years he had been granted opportunity for repentance; but he continued in sin, and with his guilt upon him, he was cut down by death, to await the awful tribunal of the judgment.

David had neglected the duty of punishing the crime of Amnon, and because of the unfaithfulness of the king and father and the impenitence of the son, the Lord permitted events to take their natural course, and did not restrain Absalom. When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, God Himself will take the case in hand. His restraining power will be in a measure removed from the agencies of evil, so that a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin.

The evil results of David’s unjust indulgence toward Amnon were not ended, for it was here that Absalom’s alienation from his father began. After he fled to Geshur, David, feeling that the crime of his son demanded some punishment, refused him permission to return. And this had a tendency to increase rather than to lessen the inextricable evils in which the king had come to be involved. Absalom, energetic, ambitious, and unprincipled, shut out by his exile from participation in the affairs of the kingdom, soon gave himself up to dangerous scheming.

At the close of two years Joab determined to effect a reconciliation between the father and his son. And with this object in view he secured the services of a woman of Tekoah, reputed for wisdom. Instructed by Joab, the woman represented herself to David as a widow whose two sons had been her only comfort and support. In a quarrel one of these had slain the other, and now all the relatives of the family demanded that the survivor should be given up to the avenger of blood. “And so,” said the mother, “they shall quench my coal which is left,

and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth." The king's feelings were touched by this appeal, and he assured the woman of the royal protection for her son.

After drawing from him repeated promises for the young man's safety, she entreated the king's forbearance, declaring that he had spoken as one at fault, in that he did not fetch home again his banished. "For," she said, "we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person; yet doth *He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him.*" This tender and touching portrayal of the love of God toward the sinner—coming as it did from Joab, the rude soldier—is a striking evidence of the familiarity of the Israelites with the great truths of redemption. The king, feeling his own need of God's mercy, could not resist this appeal. To Joab the command was given, "Go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again."

Absalom was permitted to return to Jerusalem, but not to appear at court or to meet his father. David had begun to see the evil effects of his indulgence toward his children; and tenderly as he loved this beautiful and gifted son, he felt it necessary, as a lesson both to Absalom and to the people, that abhorrence for such a crime should be manifested. Absalom lived two years in his own house, but banished from the court. His sister dwelt with him, and her presence kept alive the memory of the irreparable wrong she had suffered. In the popular estimation the prince was a hero rather than an offender. And having this advantage, he set himself to gain the hearts of the people. His personal appearance was such as to win the admiration of all beholders. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." It was not wise for the king to leave a man of Absalom's character—ambitious, impulsive, and passionate—to brood for two years over supposed grievances. And David's action in permitting him to return to Jerusalem, and yet refusing to admit him to his presence, enlisted in his behalf the sympathies of the people.

With the memory ever before him of his own transgression of the



law of God, David seemed morally paralyzed; he was weak and irresolute, when before his sin he had been courageous and decided. His influence with the people had been weakened. And all this favored the designs of his unnatural son.

Through the influence of Joab, Absalom was again admitted to his father's presence; but though there was an outward reconciliation, he continued his ambitious scheming. He now assumed an almost royal state, having chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And while the king was more and more inclined to desire retirement and solitude, Absalom sedulously courted the popular favor.

The influence of David's listlessness and irresolution extended to his subordinates; negligence and delay characterized the administration of justice. Absalom artfully turned every cause of dissatisfaction to his own advantage. Day by day this man of noble mien might be seen at the gate of the city, where a crowd of suppliants waited to present their wrongs for redress. Absalom mingled with them and listened to their grievances, expressing sympathy with their sufferings and regret at the inefficiency of the government. Having thus listened to the story of a man of Israel, the prince would reply, "Thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee;" adding, "O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him."

Fomented by the artful insinuations of the prince, discontent with the government was fast spreading. The praise of Absalom was on the lips of all. He was generally regarded as heir to the kingdom; the people looked upon him with pride as worthy of this high station, and a desire was kindled that he might occupy the throne. "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." Yet the king, blinded by affection for his son, suspected nothing. The princely state which Absalom had assumed, was regarded by David as intended to do honor to his court—as an expression of joy at the reconciliation.

Absalom assumed an almost royal state, with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

The minds of the people being prepared for what was to follow, Absalom secretly sent picked men throughout the tribes, to concert measures for a revolt. And now the cloak of religious devotion was assumed to conceal his traitorous designs. A vow made long before while he was in exile must be paid in Hebron. Absalom said to the king, "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord." The fond father, comforted with this evidence of piety in his son, dismissed him with his blessing. The conspiracy was now fully matured. Absalom's crowning act of hypocrisy was designed not only to blind the king but to establish the confidence of the people, and thus to lead them on to rebellion against the king whom God had chosen.

Absalom set forth for Hebron, and there went with him "two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything." These men went with Absalom, little thinking that their love for the son was leading them into rebellion against the father. Upon arriving at Hebron, Absalom immediately summoned Ahithophel, one of the chief counselors of David, a man in high repute for wisdom, whose opinion was thought to be as safe and wise as that of an oracle. Ahithophel joined the conspirators, and his support made the cause of Absalom appear certain of success, attracting to his standard many influential men from all parts of the land. As the trumpet of revolt was sounded, the prince's spies throughout the country spread the tidings that Absalom was king, and many of the people gathered to him.

Meanwhile the alarm was carried to Jerusalem, to the king. David was suddenly aroused, to see rebellion breaking out close beside his throne. His own son—the son whom he had loved and trusted—had been planning to seize his crown and doubtless to take his life. In his great peril David shook off the depression that had so long rested upon him, and with the spirit of his earlier years he prepared to meet this terrible emergency. Absalom was mustering his forces at Hebron, only

twenty miles away. The rebels would soon be at the gates of Jerusalem.

From his palace David looked out upon his capital—"beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, . . . the city of the great King," Psalm 48: 2. He shuddered at the thought of exposing it to carnage and devastation. Should he call to his help the subjects still loyal to his throne, and make a stand to hold his capital? Should he permit Jerusalem to be deluged with blood? His decision was taken. The horrors of war should not fall upon the chosen city. He would leave Jerusalem, and then test the fidelity of his people, giving them an opportunity to rally to his support. In this great crisis it was his duty to God and to his people to maintain the authority with which Heaven had invested him. The issue of the conflict he would trust with God.

In humility and sorrow David passed out of the gate of Jerusalem—driven from his throne, from his palace, from the ark of God, by the insurrection of his cherished son. The people followed in long, sad procession, like a funeral train. David's bodyguard of Cherethites, Pelethites, and six hundred Gittites from Gath, under the command of Ittai, accompanied the king. But David, with characteristic unselfishness, could not consent that these strangers who had sought his protection should be involved in his calamity. He expressed surprise that they should be ready to make this sacrifice for him. Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, "Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee."

Ittai answered, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." These men had been converted from paganism to the worship of Jehovah, and nobly they now proved their fidelity to their God and their king. David, with grateful heart, accepted their devotion to his apparently sinking cause, and all passed over the brook Kidron on the way toward the wilderness.

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Again the procession halted. A company clad in holy vestments was approaching. "And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God." The followers of David looked upon this as a happy omen. The presence of that sacred symbol was to them a pledge of their deliverance and ultimate victory. It would inspire the people with courage to rally to the king. Its absence from Jerusalem would bring terror to the adherents of Absalom.

At sight of the ark joy and hope for a brief moment thrilled the heart of David. But soon other thoughts came to him. As the appointed ruler of God's heritage he was under solemn responsibility. Not personal interests, but the glory of God and the good of his people, were to be uppermost in the mind of Israel's king. God, who dwelt between the cherubim, had said of Jerusalem, "This is My rest" (Psalm 132:14); and without divine authority neither priest nor king had a right to remove therefrom the symbol of His presence. And David knew that his heart and life must be in harmony with the divine precepts, else the ark would be the means of disaster rather than of success. His great sin was ever before him. He recognized in this conspiracy the just judgment of God. The sword that was not to depart from his house had been unsheathed. He knew not what the result of the struggle might be. It was not for him to remove from the capital of the nation the sacred statutes which embodied the will of their divine Sovereign, which were the constitution of the realm and the foundation of its prosperity.

He commanded Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation: but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."

David added, "Art not thou a seer?"—a man appointed of God to instruct the people. "Return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me." In the city the priests might do him good service

by learning the movements and purposes of the rebels, and secretly communicating them to the king by their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan.

As the priests turned back toward Jerusalem a deeper shadow fell upon the departing throng. Their king a fugitive, themselves outcasts, forsaken even by the ark of God—the future was dark with terror and foreboding. “And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up. And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” Again David was forced to recognize in his calamities the results of his own sin. The defection of Ahithophel, the ablest and most wily of political leaders, was prompted by revenge for the family disgrace involved in the wrong to Bathsheba, who was his granddaughter.

“And David said, O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” Upon reaching the top of the mount, the king bowed in prayer, casting upon God the burden of his soul and humbly supplicating divine mercy. His prayer seemed to be at once answered. Hushai the Archite, a wise and able counselor, who had proved himself a faithful friend to David, now came to him with his robes rent and with earth upon his head, to cast in his fortunes with the dethroned and fugitive king. David saw, as by a divine enlightenment, that this man, faithful and truehearted, was the one needed to serve the interests of the king in the councils at the capital. At David’s request Hushai returned to Jerusalem to offer his services to Absalom and defeat the crafty counsel of Ahithophel.

With this gleam of light in the darkness, the king and his followers pursued their way down the eastern slope of Olivet, through a rocky and desolate waste, through wild ravines, and along stony and precipitous paths, toward the Jordan. “And when King David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of King David: and all the people and all the mighty men



were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial. The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man."

In David's prosperity Shimei had not shown by word or act that he was not a loyal subject. But in the affliction of the king this Benjamite revealed his true character. He had honored David upon his throne, but he cursed him in his humiliation. Base and selfish, he looked upon others as of the same character as himself, and, inspired by Satan, he wreaked his hatred upon him whom God had chastened. The spirit that leads man to triumph over, to revile or distress, one who is in affliction is the spirit of Satan.

Shimei's accusations against David were utterly false—a baseless and malignant slander. David had not been guilty of wrong toward Saul or his house. When Saul was wholly in his power, and he could have slain him, he merely cut the skirt of his robe, and he reproached himself for showing even this disrespect for the Lord's anointed.

Of David's sacred regard for human life, striking evidence had been given, even while he himself was hunted like a beast of prey. One day while he was hidden in the cave of Adullam, his thoughts turning back to the untroubled freedom of his boyhood life, the fugitive exclaimed, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" 2 Samuel 23:13-17. Bethlehem was at that time in the hands of the Philistines; but three mighty men of David's band broke through the guard, and brought of the water of Bethlehem to their master. David could not drink it. "Be it far from me," he cried; "is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" And he reverently poured out the water as an offering to God. David had been a man of war, much of his life had been spent amid scenes of violence; but of all who have passed through such an ordeal, few indeed have been so little affected by its hardening, demoralizing influence as was David.

As David in sorrow left Jerusalem,
Shimei, a descendant of King Saul,
cursed him and threw stones at him.

David's nephew, Abishai, one of the bravest of his captains, could not listen patiently to Shimei's insulting words. "Why," he exclaimed, "should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But the king forbade him. "Behold," he said, "my son . . . seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day."

Conscience was uttering bitter and humiliating truths to David. While his faithful subjects wondered at his sudden reverse of fortune, it was no mystery to the king. He had often had forebodings of an hour like this. He had wondered that God had so long borne with his sins, and had delayed the merited retribution. And now in his hurried and sorrowful flight, his feet bare, his royal robes changed for sackcloth, the lamentations of his followers awaking the echoes of the hills, he thought of his loved capital—of the place which had been the scene of his sin—and as he remembered the goodness and long-suffering of God, he was not altogether without hope. He felt that the Lord would still deal with him in mercy.

Many a wrongdoer has excused his own sin by pointing to David's fall, but how few there are who manifest David's penitence and humility. How few would bear reproof and retribution with the patience and fortitude that he manifested. He had confessed his sin, and for years had sought to do his duty as a faithful servant of God; he had labored for the upbuilding of his kingdom, and under his rule it had attained to strength and prosperity never reached before. He had gathered rich stores of material for the building of the house of God, and now was all the labor of his life to be swept away? Must the results of years of consecrated toil, the work of genius and devotion and statesmanship, pass into the hands of his reckless and traitorous son, who regarded not the honor of God nor the prosperity of Israel? How natural it would have seemed for David to murmur against God in this great affliction!

But he saw in his own sin the cause of his trouble. The words of

the prophet Micah breathe the spirit that inspired David's heart. "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." Micah 7:8, 9. And the Lord did not forsake David. This chapter in his experience, when, under cruelest wrong and insult, he shows himself to be humble, unselfish, generous, and submissive, is one of the noblest in his whole experience. Never was the ruler of Israel more truly great in the sight of heaven than at this hour of his deepest outward humiliation.

Had God permitted David to go on unrebuked in sin, and while transgressing the divine precepts, to remain in peace and prosperity upon his throne, the skeptic and infidel might have had some excuse for citing the history of David as a reproach to the religion of the Bible. But in the experience through which He caused David to pass, the Lord shows that He cannot tolerate or excuse sin. And David's history enables us to see also the great ends which God has in view in His dealings with sin; it enables us to trace, even through darkest judgments, the working out of His purposes of mercy and beneficence. He caused David to pass under the rod, but He did not destroy him; the furnace is to purify, but not to consume. The Lord says, "If they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail." Psalm 89:31-33.

Soon after David left Jerusalem, Absalom and his army entered, and without a struggle took possession of the stronghold of Israel. Hushai was among the first to greet the new-crowned monarch, and the prince was surprised and gratified at the accession of his father's old friend and counselor. Absalom was confident of success. Thus far his schemes had prospered, and eager to strengthen his throne and secure the confidence of the nation, he welcomed Hushai to his court.

Absalom was now surrounded by a large force, but it was mostly composed of men untrained for war. As yet they had not been brought

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into conflict. Ahithophel well knew that David's situation was far from hopeless. A large part of the nation were still true to him; he was surrounded by tried warriors, who were faithful to their king, and his army was commanded by able and experienced generals. Ahithophel knew that after the first burst of enthusiasm in favor of the new king, a reaction would come. Should the rebellion fail, Absalom might be able to secure a reconciliation with his father; then Ahithophel, as his chief counselor, would be held most guilty for the rebellion; upon him the heaviest punishment would fall. To prevent Absalom from retracing his steps, Ahithophel counseled him to an act that in the eyes of the whole nation would make reconciliation impossible. With hellish cunning this wily and unprincipled statesman urged Absalom to add the crime of incest to that of rebellion. In the sight of all Israel he was to take to himself his father's concubines, according to the custom of oriental nations, thus declaring that he succeeded to his father's throne. And Absalom carried out the vile suggestion. Thus was fulfilled the word of God to David by the prophet, "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor. . . . For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."



2 Samuel 12: 11, 12. Not that God prompted these acts of wickedness, but because of David's sin He did not exercise His power to prevent them.

Ahithophel had been held in high esteem for his wisdom, but he was destitute of the enlightenment which comes from God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9: 10); and this, Ahithophel did not possess, or he could hardly have based the success of treason upon the crime of incest. Men of corrupt hearts plot wickedness, as if there were no overruling Providence to cross their designs; but "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." Psalm 2: 4. The Lord declares: "They would none of My counsel: they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Proverbs 1: 30-32.

Having succeeded in the plot for securing his own safety, Ahithophel urged upon Absalom the necessity of immediate action against David. "Let me now choose out twelve thousand men," he said, "and I will arise and pursue after David this night: and I will come upon him while he is weary and weakhanded, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: and I will bring back all the people unto thee." This plan was approved by the king's counselors. Had it been followed, David would surely have been slain, unless the Lord had directly interposed to save him. But a wisdom higher than that of the renowned Ahithophel was directing events. "The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom."

Hushai had not been called to the council, and he would not intrude himself unasked, lest suspicion should be drawn upon him as a spy; but after the assembly had dispersed, Absalom, who had a high regard for the judgment of his father's counselor, submitted to him the plan of Ahithophel. Hushai saw that if the proposed plan were followed, David would be lost. And he said, "The counsel that Ahitho-

phel hath given is not good at this time. For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place;" he argued that, if Absalom's forces should pursue David, they would not capture the king; and should they suffer a reverse, it would tend to dishearten them and work great harm to Absalom's cause. "For," he said, "all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men." And he suggested a plan attractive to a vain and selfish nature, fond of the show of power: "I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.

"And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." But there was one who was not deceived—one who clearly foresaw the result of this fatal mistake of Absalom's. Ahithophel knew that the cause of the rebels was lost. And he knew that whatever might be the fate of the prince, there was no hope for the counselor who had instigated his greatest crimes. Ahithophel had encouraged Absalom in rebellion; he had counseled him to the most abominable wickedness, to the dishonor of his father; he had advised the slaying of David and had planned its accomplishment; he had cut off the last possibility of his own reconciliation with the king; and now another was preferred before him, even by Absalom. Jealous, angry, and desperate, Ahithophel "gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died." Such was the result of the wisdom of one, who, with all his high endowments, did not make God

his counselor. Satan allures men with flattering promises, but in the end it will be found by every soul, that the "wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23.

Hushai, not certain that his counsel would be followed by the fickle king, lost no time in warning David to escape beyond Jordan without delay. To the priests, who were to forward it by their sons, Hushai sent the message: "Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counseled. Now therefore . . . lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him."

The young men were suspected and pursued, yet they succeeded in performing their perilous mission. David, spent with toil and grief after that first day of flight, received the message that he must cross the Jordan that night, for his son was seeking his life.

What were the feelings of the father and king, so cruelly wronged, in this terrible peril? "A mighty valiant man," a man of war, a king, whose word was law, betrayed by his son whom he had loved and indulged and unwisely trusted, wronged and deserted by subjects bound to him by the strongest ties of honor and fealty—in what words did David pour out the feelings of his soul? In the hour of his darkest trial David's heart was stayed upon God, and he sang:

"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!
 Many are they that rise up against me.
 Many there be which say of my soul,
 There is no help for him in God.
 But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me;
 My glory, and the lifter up of mine head.
 I cried unto the Lord with my voice,
 And He heard me out of His holy hill.
 I laid me down and slept;
 I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.
 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,
 That have set themselves against me round about. . . .
 Salvation belongeth unto the Lord:
 Thy blessing is upon Thy people." Psalm 3:1-8.

David and all his company—warriors and statesmen, old men and youth, the women and the little children—in the darkness of night crossed the deep and swift-flowing river. “By the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan.”

David and his forces fell back to Mahanaim, which had been the royal seat of Ishbosheth. This was a strongly fortified city, surrounded by a mountainous district favorable for retreat in case of war. The country was well-provisioned, and the people were friendly to the cause of David. Here many adherents joined him, while wealthy tribesmen brought abundant gifts of provision, and other needed supplies.

Hushai’s counsel had achieved its object, gaining for David opportunity for escape; but the rash and impetuous prince could not be long restrained, and he soon set out in pursuit of his father. “And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.” Absalom made Amasa, the son of David’s sister Abigail, commander-in-chief of his forces. His army was large, but it was undisciplined and poorly prepared to cope with the tried soldiers of his father.

David divided his forces into three battalions under the command of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. It had been his purpose himself to lead his army in the field; but against this the officers of the army, the counselors, and the people vehemently protested. “Thou shalt not go forth,” they said: “for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou be ready to succour us out of the city. And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do.” 2 Samuel 18:3, 4, R.V.

From the walls of the city the long lines of the rebel army were in full view. The usurper was accompanied by a vast host, in comparison with which David’s force seemed but a handful. But as the king looked upon the opposing forces, the thought uppermost in his mind was not of the crown and the kingdom, nor of his own life, that depended upon the wage of battle. The father’s heart was filled with love and pity for his rebellious son. As the army filed out from the city gates David encouraged his faithful soldiers, bidding them go forth

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trusting that the God of Israel would give them the victory. But even here he could not repress his love for Absalom. As Joab, leading the first column, passed his king, the conqueror of a hundred battlefields stooped his proud head to hear the monarch's last message, as with trembling voice he said, "Deal gently *for my sake* with the young man, even with Absalom." And Abishai and Ittai received the same charge — "Deal gently *for my sake* with the young man, even with Absalom." But the king's solicitude, seeming to declare that Absalom was dearer to him than his kingdom, dearer even than the subjects faithful to his throne, only increased the indignation of the soldiers against the unnatural son.

The place of battle was a wood near the Jordan, in which the great numbers of Absalom's army were only a disadvantage to him. Among the thickets and marshes of the forest these undisciplined troops became confused and unmanageable. And "the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men." Absalom, seeing that the day was lost, had turned to flee, when his head was caught between the branches of a widespreading tree, and his mule going out from under him, he was left helplessly suspended, a prey to his enemies. In this



condition he was found by a soldier, who, for fear of displeasing the king, spared Absalom, but reported to Joab what he had seen. Joab was restrained by no scruples. He had befriended Absalom, having twice secured his reconciliation with David, and the trust had been shamelessly betrayed. But for the advantages gained by Absalom through Joab's intercession, this rebellion, with all its horrors, could never have occurred. Now it was in Joab's power at one blow to destroy the instigator of all this evil. "And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom. . . . And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him."

Thus perished the instigators of rebellion in Israel. Ahithophel had died by his own hand. The princely Absalom, whose glorious beauty had been the pride of Israel, had been cut down in the vigor of his youth, his dead body thrust into a pit, and covered with a heap of stones, in token of everlasting reproach. During his lifetime Absalom had reared for himself a costly monument in the king's dale, but the only memorial which marked his grave was that heap of stones in the wilderness.

The leader of the rebellion being slain, Joab by the sound of the trumpet recalled his army from the pursuit of the fleeing host, and messengers were at once dispatched to bear the tidings to the king.

The watchman upon the city wall, looking out toward the battlefield, discovered a man running alone. Soon a second came in sight. As the first drew nearer, the watchman said to the king, who was waiting beside the gate, "Methinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." To the king's eager inquiry, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz returned an evasive answer.

The second messenger came, crying, "Tidings, my lord the king:



for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." Again from the father's lips came the absorbing question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Unable to conceal the heavy tidings, the herald answered, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." It was enough. David questioned no further, but with bowed head he "went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The victorious army, returning from the field, approached the city, their shouts of triumph awaking the echoes of the hills. But as they entered the city gate the shout died away, their banners drooped in their hands, and with downcast gaze they advanced more like those who had suffered defeat than like conquerors. For the king was not waiting to bid them welcome, but from the chamber above the gate his wailing cry was heard, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

"The victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people; for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle."

Joab was filled with indignation. God had given them reason for triumph and gladness; the greatest rebellion that had ever been known in Israel had been crushed; and yet this great victory was turned to mourning for him whose crime had cost the blood of thousands of brave men. The rude, blunt captain pushed his way into the presence of the king, and boldly said, "Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters; . . . in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will

not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.”

Harsh and even cruel as was the reproof to the heart-stricken king, David did not resent it. Seeing that his general was right, he went down to the gate, and with words of courage and commendation greeted his brave soldiers as they marched past him.



The Last Years of David

THE overthrow of Absalom did not at once bring peace to the kingdom. So large a part of the nation had joined in revolt that David would not return to his capital and resume his authority without an invitation from the tribe. In the confusion that followed Absalom's defeat there was no prompt and decided action to recall the king, and when at last Judah undertook to bring back David, the jealousy of the other tribes was roused, and a counterrevolution followed. This, however, was speedily quelled, and peace returned to Israel.

The history of David affords one of the most impressive testimonies ever given to the dangers that threaten the soul from power and riches and worldly honor—those things that are most eagerly desired among men. Few have ever passed through an experience better adapted to prepare them for enduring such a test. David's early life as a shepherd, with its lessons of humility, of patient toil, and of tender care for his flocks; the communion with nature in the solitude of the hills, developing his genius for music and poetry, and directing his thoughts to the Creator; the long discipline of his wilderness life, calling into exercise courage, fortitude, patience, and faith in God, had been appointed by the Lord as a preparation for the throne of Israel. David

This chapter is based on 2 Samuel 24; 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 21; 28; 29.

In response to David's appeal for material to build the house of the Lord, the people gave generously.

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had enjoyed precious experiences of the love of God, and had been richly endowed with His Spirit; in the history of Saul he had seen the utter worthlessness of mere human wisdom. And yet worldly success and honor so weakened the character of David that he was repeatedly overcome by the tempter.

Intercourse with heathen peoples led to a desire to follow their national customs and kindled ambition for worldly greatness. As the people of Jehovah, Israel was to be honored; but as pride and self-confidence increased, the Israelites were not content with this pre-eminence. They cared rather for their standing among other nations. This spirit could not fail to invite temptation. With a view to extending his conquests among foreign nations, David determined to increase his army by requiring military service from all who were of proper age. To effect this, it became necessary to take a census of the population. It was pride and ambition that prompted this action of the king. The numbering of the people would show the contrast between the weakness of the kingdom when David ascended the throne and its strength and prosperity under his rule. This would tend still further to foster the already too great self-confidence of both king and people. The Scripture says, "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." The prosperity of Israel under David had been due to the blessing of God rather than to the ability of her king or the strength of her armies. But the increasing of the military resources of the kingdom would give the impression to surrounding nations that Israel's trust was in her armies, and not in the power of Jehovah.

Though the people of Israel were proud of their national greatness, they did not look with favor upon David's plan for so greatly extending the military service. The proposed enrollment caused much dissatisfaction; consequently it was thought necessary to employ the military officers in place of the priests and magistrates, who had formerly taken the census. The object of the undertaking was directly contrary to the principles of a theocracy. Even Joab remonstrated, unscrupulous as he had heretofore shown himself. He said, "The Lord make His people a hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord

the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem." The numbering was not finished when David was convicted of his sin. Self-condemned, he "said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech Thee, do away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." The next morning a message was brought to David by the prophet Gad: "Thus saith the Lord, Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore," said the prophet, "advise thyself what word I shall bring again to Him that sent me."

The king's answer was, "I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man."

The land was smitten with pestilence, which destroyed seventy thousand in Israel. The scourge had not yet entered the capital, when "David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces." The king pleaded with God in behalf of Israel: "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued."

The taking of the census had caused disaffection among the people; yet they had themselves cherished the same sins that prompted David's action. As the Lord through Absalom's sin visited judgment upon David, so through David's error He punished the sins of Israel.

The destroying angel had stayed his course outside Jerusalem. He

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stood upon Mount Moriah, "in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Directed by the prophet, David went to the mountain, and there built an altar to the Lord, "and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering." "So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

The spot upon which the altar was erected, henceforth ever to be regarded as holy ground, was tendered to the king by Ornan as a gift. But the king declined thus to receive it. "I will verily buy it for the full price," he said; "for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight." This spot, memorable as the place where Abraham had built the altar to offer up his son, and now hallowed by this great deliverance, was afterward chosen as the site of the temple erected by Solomon.

Still another shadow was to gather over the last years of David. He had reached the age of threescore and ten. The hardships and exposures of his early wanderings, his many wars, the cares and afflictions of his later years, had sapped the fountain of life. Though his mind retained its clearness and strength, feebleness and age, with their desire for seclusion, prevented a quick apprehension of what was passing in the kingdom, and again rebellion sprang up in the very



shadow of the throne. Again the fruit of David's parental indulgence was manifest. The one who now aspired to the throne was Adonijah, "a very goodly man" in person and bearing, but unprincipled and reckless. In his youth he had been subjected to but little restraint; for "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" He now rebelled against the authority of God, who had appointed Solomon to the throne. Both by natural endowments and religious character Solomon was better qualified than his elder brother to become ruler of Israel; yet although the choice of God had been clearly indicated Adonijah did not fail to find sympathizers. Joab, though guilty of many crimes, had heretofore been loyal to the throne; but he now joined the conspiracy against Solomon, as did also Abiathar the priest.

The rebellion was ripe; the conspirators had assembled at a great feast just without the city to proclaim Adonijah king, when their plans were thwarted by the prompt action of a few faithful persons, chief among whom were Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. They represented the state of affairs to the king, reminding him of the divine direction that Solomon should succeed to the throne. David at once abdicated in favor of Solomon, who was immediately anointed and proclaimed king. The conspiracy was crushed. Its chief actors had incurred the penalty of death. Abiathar's life was spared, out of respect to his office and his former fidelity to David; but he was degraded from the office of high priest, which passed to the line of Zadok. Joab and Adonijah were spared for the time, but after the death of David they suffered the penalty of their crime. The execution of the sentence upon the son of David completed the fourfold judgment that testified to God's abhorrence of the father's sin.

From the very opening of David's reign one of his most cherished plans had been that of erecting a temple to the Lord. Though he had not been permitted to execute this design, he had manifested no less zeal and earnestness in its behalf. He had provided an abundance of the most costly material—gold, silver, onyx stones, and stones of divers

colors; marble, and the most precious woods. And now these valuable treasures that he had collected must be committed to others; for other hands must build the house for the ark, the symbol of God's presence.

Seeing that his end was near, the king summoned the princes of Israel, with representative men from all parts of the kingdom, to receive this legacy in trust. He desired to commit to them his dying charge and secure their concurrence and support in the great work to be accomplished. Because of his physical weakness, it had not been expected that he would attend to this transfer in person; but the inspiration of God came upon him, and with more than his wonted fervor and power, he was able, for the last time, to address his people. He told them of his own desire to build the temple, and of the Lord's command that the work should be committed to Solomon his son. The divine assurance was, "Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father. Moreover I will establish his kingdom forever, if he be constant to do My commandments and My judgments, as at this day." "Now therefore," David said, "in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you forever."

David had learned by his own experience how hard is the path of him who departs from God. He had felt the condemnation of the broken law, and had reaped the fruits of transgression; and his whole soul was moved with solicitude that the leaders of Israel should be true to God, and that Solomon should obey God's law, shunning the sins that had weakened his father's authority, embittered his life, and dishonored God. David knew that it would require humility of heart, a constant trust in God, and unceasing watchfulness to withstand the temptations that would surely beset Solomon in his exalted station; for such prominent characters are a special mark for the shafts of Satan. Turning to his son, already acknowledged as his successor on the throne, David said: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the

God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it."

David gave Solomon minute directions for building the temple, with patterns of every part, and of all its instruments of service, as had been revealed to him by divine inspiration. Solomon was still young, and shrank from the weighty responsibilities that would devolve upon him in the erection of the temple and in the government of God's people. David said to his son, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Again David appealed to the congregation: "Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." He said, "I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God," and he went on to enumerate the materials he had gathered. More than this, he said, "I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal." "Who then," he asked of the assembled multitude that had brought their liberal gifts—"who then is willing to consecrate his *service* this day unto the Lord?"

There was a ready response from the assembly. "The chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, and gave, for the service of the house of God, of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found

gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord. . . . Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

"Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own. I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness.

"As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy Thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto Thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee: and give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep Thy commandments, Thy testimonies, and Thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision. And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshiped the Lord."

With deepest interest the king had gathered the rich material for building and beautifying the temple. He had composed the glorious

anthems that in afteryears should echo through its courts. Now his heart was made glad in God, as the chief of the fathers and the princes of Israel so nobly responded to his appeal, and offered themselves to the important work before them. And as they gave their service, they were disposed to do more. They swelled the offerings, giving of their own possessions into the treasury. David had felt deeply his own unworthiness in gathering the material for the house of God, and the expression of loyalty in the ready response of the nobles of his kingdom, as with willing hearts they dedicated their treasures to Jehovah and devoted themselves to His service, filled him with joy. But it was God alone who had imparted this disposition to His people. He, not man, must be glorified. It was He who had provided the people with the riches of earth, and His Spirit had made them willing to bring their precious things for the temple. It was all of the Lord; if His love had not moved upon the hearts of the people, the king's efforts would have been vain, and the temple would never have been erected.

All that man receives of God's bounty still belongs to God. Whatever God has bestowed in the valuable and beautiful things of earth is placed in the hands of men to test them—to sound the depths of their love for Him and their appreciation of His favors. Whether it be the treasures of wealth or of intellect, they are to be laid, a willing offering, at the feet of Jesus; the giver saying, meanwhile, with David, "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

When he felt that death was approaching, the burden of David's heart was still for Solomon and for the kingdom of Israel, whose prosperity must so largely depend upon the fidelity of her king. "And he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, . . . that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: that the Lord may continue His word which He spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not

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fail thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel." 1 Kings 2:1-4.

David's "last words," as recorded, are a song—a song of trust, of loftiest principle, and undying faith:

"David the son of Jesse saith,
And the man who was raised on high saith,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel:
The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me: . . .
One that ruleth over men righteously,
That ruleth in the fear of God,
He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,
A morning without clouds;
When the tender grass springeth out of the earth,
Through clear shining after rain.
Verily my house is not so with God;
Yet He hath made me an everlasting covenant,
Ordered in all things, and sure:
For it is all my salvation, and all my desire."

2 Samuel 23:1-5, R.V.

Great had been David's fall, but deep was his repentance, ardent was his love, and strong his faith. He had been forgiven much, and therefore he loved much. Luke 7:48.

The psalms of David pass through the whole range of experience, from the depths of conscious guilt and self-condemnation to the loftiest faith and the most exalted communing with God. His life record declares that sin can bring only shame and woe, but that God's love and mercy can reach to the deepest depths, that faith will lift up the repenting soul to share the adoption of the sons of God. Of all the assurances which His Word contains, it is one of the strongest testimonies to the faithfulness, the justice, and the covenant mercy of God.

Man "fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not," "but the word of our God shall stand forever." "The mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." Job 14:2; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 103:17, 18.

"Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever." Ecclesiastes 3:14.

Glorious are the promises made to David and his house, promises that look forward to the eternal ages, and find their complete fulfillment in Christ. The Lord declared:

"I have sworn unto David My servant . . . with whom My hand shall be established: Mine arm also shall strengthen him. . . . My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him: and in My name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto Me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. Also I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him." Psalm 89:3-28.

"His seed also will I make to endure forever,
And his throne as the days of heaven." Psalm 89:29.

"He shall judge the poor of the people,
He shall save the children of the needy,
And shall break in pieces the oppressor.
They shall fear thee while the sun endureth,
And so long as the moon, throughout all generations. . . .
In his days shall the righteous flourish;
And abundance of peace, till the moon be no more.
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the river unto the ends of the earth."

"His name shall endure forever:
His name shall be continued as long as the sun:
And men shall be blessed in him:
All nations shall call him blessed." Psalm 72:4-8, R.V., 17.

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:32, 33.

Appendix

NOTE 1. PAGE 269. In the command for Israel's release, the Lord said to Pharaoh, "Israel is My Son, even My first-born. . . . Let My son go, that he may serve Me." Exodus 4:22, 23. The psalmist tells us why God delivered Israel from Egypt: "He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness: and gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labor of the people; that they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws." Psalm 105:43-45. Here we learn that the Hebrews could not serve God in Egypt.

In Deuteronomy 5:14, 15 we find special emphasis given to that portion of the fourth commandment which requires the manservant and the maid-servant to rest, and the Israelite was told to remember that he had been a servant in the land of Egypt. The Lord said, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day." In Exodus 5:5 we learn that Moses and Aaron made the people "*rest* from their burdens."

From these facts we may conclude that the Sabbath was one of the things in which they could not serve the Lord in Egypt; and when Moses and Aaron came with the message of God (Exodus 4:29-31), they attempted a reform, which only increased the oppression. The Israelites were delivered that they might observe the statutes of the Lord, including the fourth commandment, and this placed upon them an additional obligation to keep the Sabbath strictly, as well as to keep all the commandments. Thus in Deuteronomy 24:17, 18

the fact of their deliverance from Egypt is cited as placing them under special obligation to show kindness to the widow and the fatherless: "Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: but thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing."

NOTE 2. PAGE 283. That the plagues were designed to destroy the confidence of the Egyptians in the power and protection of their idols, and even made their gods to appear as cruel tormentors of their worshipers, can be seen from a study of the Egyptian religion. A few examples may serve to illustrate this fact.

The first plague, turning the water of the river Nile and of all canals into blood (Exodus 7:19), was directed against the source of Egypt's very existence. The river Nile was regarded with religious reverence, and at several places sacrifices were offered to the Nile as to a god.

The second plague brought frogs over Egypt. Exodus 8:6. Frogs were held sacred by the Egyptians, and one of their deities, Heqa, was a frog-headed goddess thought to possess creative power. When the frogs, as the result of Moses' command, multiplied to the extent that they filled the land from one end to the other, the Egyptians may have wondered why Heqa was tormenting her ardent worshipers instead of protecting them. In this way the Egyptians were not only punished by the second plague, but witnessed also contempt heaped upon them, as they supposed, by one of their gods (Exodus 9:3), of which many represented powerful gods in the Egyptian pantheon. To mention only a few, we find that the Apis bull was dedicated to Ptah, the father of all the gods, the cow was sacred to Hathor, one of the most widely worshiped of all female deities of the Nile country, while the ram represented several gods like Khnemu, and the ram-headed Amen, who was Egypt's chief god in the New Empire period. Hence, the disease which slew the animals dedicated to their deities revealed to the Egyptians the impotence of their gods in the presence of the God of the despised Hebrews.

The ninth plague (Exodus 10:21) dealt a heavy blow to one of the greatest gods of Egypt, the sun god Ra, who had been continuously worshiped from the earliest times of that country's known history. In a land which hardly ever saw clouds in the sky, the sun was recognized as a never-failing power which provided warmth, light, life, and growth to the whole world. Every Egyptian king considered himself as a "son of Ra," and carried this expression in his titulary. When Amen of Thebes became chief god of Egypt during the eighteenth dynasty, the power of the sun-god Ra was recognized as so great that a compromise was made by combining Amen and Ra to make one god—Amen-Ra. A few years after the Exodus, when Ikhnaton introduced a short-lived monotheism, the only god retained was Aton, the sun disk. Seeing how entrenched

sunworship was in the religious life of the Egyptians, and how highly the sun god Ra, Amen-Ra, or Aton was revered, we can understand why the plague directed against the god was brought upon Egypt toward the culmination of the fight between the God of the Hebrews and His Egyptian adversaries.

Also the tenth plague, the slaughtering of the first-born (Exodus 12:29), was striking at least one god, and that was the king, who was considered to be Horus, the son of Osiris. As the ruler of the Nile country, he was addressed by his subjects as "the good god." Hence, the last plague crowned the actions wrought by the miracle-working power of the Hebrew God. So far gods controlling the forces of nature or animals had been disgraced, but now a god living in a visible form among the Egyptians was also humiliated by the despised God of the Hebrew slaves, of whom the proud Pharaoh once had said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." Exodus 5:2.

NOTE 3. PAGE 294. In Genesis 15:13 we read that the Lord said to Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." This text raises the questions whether the 400 years refer to the time of affliction or sojourning, or both, and what the relation of the 400 years is to the 430 years of Exodus 12:40, 41, and Galatians 3:16, 17.

The statement in Exodus 12:40, that "the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years," gives the impression that the Israelites, from Jacob's entry into Egypt to the Exodus, actually spent 430 years in the country of the Nile. That this impression cannot be correct is obvious from Paul's inspired interpretation presented in Galatians 3:16, 17, where the 430 years are said to cover the period beginning when God made His covenant with Abraham until the law was promulgated at Sinai. Paul seems to refer to the first promise made by God to Abraham when he was called to leave Haran. Genesis 12:1-3. At that time the 430 years began, when Abraham was seventy-five years old (chapter 12:4), while the 400 years of the prophecy of Genesis 15:13 began thirty years later, when Abraham was 105 and his son Isaac five years old (chapter 21:5). At that time Ishmael, who "was born after the flesh persecuted him [Isaac] that was born after the Spirit" (Galatians 4:29; Genesis 21:9-11), beginning a time of affliction of Abraham's seed which intermittently would be continued until the time of the Exodus. Isaac had not only troubles with his half brother Ishmael, but also with the Philistines (Genesis 26:15, 20, 21); Jacob fled for his life from Esau (Genesis 27:41-43), and later from Laban (Genesis 31:21), and then was again in jeopardy from Esau (Genesis 32:8); Joseph was sold into slavery by his brethren (Genesis 37:28), and the children of Israel were oppressed by the Egyptians for many decades (Exodus 1:14).

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The time from Abraham's call to Jacob's entry into Egypt was 215 years, being the total of (1) twenty-five years lying between Abraham's call and the birth of Isaac (Genesis 12:4; 21:5), (2) sixty years lying between Isaac's birth and Jacob's birth (Genesis 25:26), and (3) the age of Jacob at the time of his migration into Egypt (Genesis 47:9). This leaves the remaining 215 years of the 430 as the actual time the Hebrews spent in Egypt. Hence the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 includes the sojourn of the patriarchs in Canaan as well as their stay in Egypt. Since in the time of Moses, Palestine was part of the Egyptian Empire, it is not strange to find an author of that period including Canaan in the term "Egypt." The translators of the Septuagint, knowing that the 430 years included the sojourn of the patriarchs in Canaan, made this point clear in their rendering of this passage: "And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan, was four hundred and thirty years." An additional corroboration of the interpretation of the 430 years given above is found in the prophecy that the fourth generation of those who had entered Egypt would leave it (Genesis 15:16), and its recorded fulfillment in Exodus 6:16-20.

NOTE 4. PAGE 336. The Israelites, in their adoration of the golden calf, *professed* to be worshiping God. Thus Aaron, when inaugurating the worship of the idol, proclaimed, "Tomorrow is a feast unto Jehovah." They proposed to worship God, as the Egyptians worshiped Osiris, under the semblance of the image. But God could not accept the service. Though offered in His name, the sun-god, and not Jehovah, was the real object of their adoration.

The worship of Apis was accompanied with the grossest licentiousness, and the Scripture record indicates that the calf worship by the Israelites was attended with all the license usual in heathen worship. We read: "They rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Exodus 32:6. The Hebrew word rendered "to play" signifies playing with leaping, singing, and dancing. This dancing, especially among the Egyptians, was sensual and indecent. The word rendered "corrupted" in the next verse, where it is said, "Thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves," is the same that is used in Genesis 6:11, 12, where we read that the earth was corrupt, "for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." This explains the terrible anger of the Lord, and why He desired to consume the people at once.

NOTE 5. PAGE 350. The Ten Commandments were the "covenant" to which the Lord referred when, in proposing a covenant with Israel, He said, "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant," etc. Exodus 19:5. The Ten Commandments were termed God's "covenant" before the covenant

was made with Israel. They were *not an agreement* made, but something which God *commanded them to perform*. Thus the Ten Commandments—God's covenant—became the *basis* of the covenant made between Him and Israel. The Ten Commandments in all their details are “all these words,” *concerning which* the covenant was made. See Exodus 24:8.

NOTE 6. PAGE 379. When a sin offering was presented for a priest or for the whole congregation, the blood was carried into the holy place and sprinkled before the veil and placed upon the horns of the golden altar. The fat was consumed upon the altar of burnt offering in the court, but the body of the victim was burned without the camp. See Leviticus 4:1-21.

When, however, the offering was for a ruler or for one of the people, the blood was not taken into the holy place, but the flesh was to be eaten by the priest, as the Lord directed Moses: “The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in a holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting.” Leviticus 6:26, R.V. See also Leviticus 4:22-35.

NOTE 7. PAGE 393. That the One who spoke the law, who called Moses into the mount and talked with him, was our Lord Jesus Christ, is evident from the following considerations:

Christ is the one through whom God has at all times revealed Himself to man. “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, *by whom are all things*, and we by Him.” 1 Corinthians 8:6. “This is he [Moses], that was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.” Acts 7:38. This angel was the Angel of God's presence (Isaiah 63:9), the Angel in whom was the name of the great Jehovah (Exodus 23:20-23). The expression can refer to no other than the Son of God.

Again: Christ is called the Word of God. John 1:1-3. He is so called because God gave His revelations to man in all ages through Christ. It was His Spirit that inspired the prophets. 1 Peter 1:10, 11. He was revealed to them as the Angel of Jehovah, the Captain of the Lord's host, Michael the Archangel.

NOTE 8. PAGE 675. The question has been raised, and is now much agitated, If a theocracy was good in the time of Israel, why would not a theocratical form of government be equally good for this time? The answer is easy:

A theocracy is a government which derives its power immediately from God. The government of Israel was a true theocracy. That was really a government of God. At the burning bush, God commissioned Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. By signs and wonders and mighty miracles multiplied, God delivered Israel from Egypt and led them through the wilderness and finally into the

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Promised Land. There He ruled them by judges "until Samuel the prophet," to whom, when he was a child, God spoke, and by whom He made known His will. In the days of Samuel the people asked that they might have a king. This was allowed, and God chose Saul, and Samuel anointed him king of Israel. Saul failed to do the will of God; and as he rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejected him from being king and sent Samuel to anoint David king of Israel; and David's throne God established forevermore. When Solomon succeeded to the kingdom in the place of David his father, the record is: "Then Solomon sat on the *throne of the Lord* as king instead of David his father." 1 Chronicles 29:23. David's throne was the throne of the Lord, and Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king over the earthly kingdom of God. The succession to the throne descended in David's line to Zedekiah, who was made subject to the king of Babylon, and who entered into a solemn covenant before God that he would loyally render allegiance to the king of Babylon. But Zedekiah broke his covenant, and then God said to him:

"Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him." Ezekiel 21:25-27. See also chapter 17:1-21.

The kingdom was then subject to Babylon. When Babylon fell, and Medo-Persia succeeded, it was overturned the first time. When Medo-Persia fell and was succeeded by Greece, it was overturned the second time. When the Greek Empire gave way to Rome, it was overturned the third time. And then says the Word, "It shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him." Who is He whose right it is? "Thou . . . shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1:31-33. And while He was here as "that Prophet," a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, the night in which He was betrayed He Himself declared, "My kingdom is not of this world." Thus the throne of the Lord has been removed from this world and will "be no more, until He come whose right it is," and then it will be given Him. And *that time* is the end of this world, and the beginning of "the world to come."

To the twelve apostles the Saviour said, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke 22:29, 30. From Matthew's account of Christ's promise to the Twelve we learn when it will be fulfilled: "In the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging

the twelve tribes of Israel." Matthew 19:28. In the parable of the talents, Christ represents Himself under the figure of a nobleman who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." Luke 19:12. And He Himself has told us when He will sit upon the throne of His glory: "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, *then* shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations." Matthew 25:31, 32.

To this time the revelator looks forward when he says, "The kingdoms of this world *are become* the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." Revelation 11:15. The context clearly shows when this will take place: "The nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." Verse 18. It is at the time of the final judgment, the reward of the righteous, and the punishment of the wicked that the kingdom of Christ will be set up. When all who oppose the sovereignty of Christ have been destroyed, the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

Then Christ will reign, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Revelation 19:16. "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High." And "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." Daniel 7:27, 18.

Until that time the kingdom of Christ cannot be established on the earth. His kingdom is not of this world. His followers are to account themselves "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 11:13; Philippians 3:20, R.V.

Since the kingdom of Israel passed away, God has never delegated authority to any man or body of men to execute His laws as such. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Romans 12:19. Civil governments have to do with the relations of man with man; but they have nothing whatever to do with the duties that grow out of man's relation to God.

Except the kingdom of Israel, no government has ever existed on the earth in which God by inspired men directed the affairs of state. Whenever men have endeavored to form such a government as that of Israel, they have, of necessity, taken it upon themselves to interpret and enforce the law of God. They have assumed the right to control the conscience, and thus have usurped the prerogative of God.

In the former dispensation, while sins against God were visited with temporal penalties, the judgments executed were not only by divine sanction, but

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under His direct control, and by His command. Sorcerers were to be put to death. Idolaters were to be slain. Profanity and sacrilege were punished with death. Whole nations of idolaters were to be exterminated. But the infliction of these penalties was directed by Him who reads the hearts of men, who knows the measure of their guilt, and who deals with His creatures in wisdom and mercy. When men, with human frailties and passions, undertake to do this work, it needs no argument to show that the door is opened to unrestrained injustice and cruelty. The most inhuman crimes will be perpetrated, and all in the sacred name of Christ.

From the laws of Israel, which punished offenses against God, arguments have been drawn to prove the duty of punishing similar sins in this age. All persecutors have employed them to justify their deeds. The principle that God has delegated to human authority the right to control the conscience is the very foundation of religious tyranny and persecution. But all who reason thus lose sight of the fact that we are now living in a different dispensation, under conditions wholly different from those of Israel; that the kingdom of Israel was a type of the kingdom of Christ, which will not be set up until His second coming; and that the duties which pertain to man's relation to God are not to be regulated or enforced by human authority.

NOTE 9. PAGE 682. Concerning the identity of the Ramah of Samuel with the Ramah of Benjamin, Dr. Edersheim says: "These two points seem established: Saul's residence was at Gibeah, and he first met Samuel in Ramah. But if so, it seems impossible, in view of 1 Samuel 10:2, to identify the Ramah of Samuel with the Ramah of Benjamin, or to regard it as the modern *Neby Samuel*, four miles northwest of Jerusalem."

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